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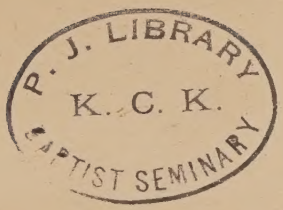

THE DECAY

OF

MODERN PREACHING

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MODERN PREACHING

AN ESSAY

BY

J. P. MAHAFFY

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THE DECAY OF MODERN PREACHING.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. THERE are perhaps few institutions in modern life more universally accepted, and, at the same time, decried, than that of preaching. The Reformed side of the Christian Church, which, among its various sects, from Ritualist to Revivalist, includes most of the better classes of the English people, is agreed on the importance of this manner of propagating and confirming the faith. Not only do the parting words of our Lord specially enjoin it, but the great conquests of the early Church, so far as they can be ascribed to any human effort, are commonly ascribed to it. In those sects which have no

established ritual, or where the ritual is so unattractive as to command little interest, preaching forms a main part of modern worship, and *extempore* prayer is generally little more than an indirect exhortation of the same kind. Most people, whether really religious or not, are conservative enough to go regularly to their church on Sunday, and would feel that they had been defrauded of part of their due exercise if the sermon were omitted. A great preacher, though perhaps no longer a great power, attracts crowds of hearers wherever he is to be heard.

And yet in this very case it is plain enough that he no longer occupies the position which preachers once held. How common it is to hear the remark, that such an one has thrown away his opportunities, that he might have shone in the senate or at the bar! Men feel that, however impressive or affecting he may be in the pulpit, he only affords a sort of

religious pastime to society; whereas their serious affairs—as if religion were not the most serious of all—are always *debated*, and on other platforms.

If this be the condescending verdict on great and successful preachers, what indulgence are the average likely to obtain? Any one who, coming from a strange country, were to overhear the ordinary congregations of our churches as they come out, from the first impatient rush of boys and servants to the sober exit of the elders and church-wardens, would wonder at the harsh strictures, at the indifference, at the *ennui* expressed by the majority, even when well educated and highly intelligent. The most regular and attentive churchgoers do not fall behind the rest in speaking freely of the dulness, the sameness, the inconsequence, the narrowness, the laxity, the length of the sermon. A preacher of any but the highest powers who ventures to detain his

hearers beyond half an hour, is regarded as a sort of social criminal, and the prospect of an hour's sermon would keep most people away. How far are we removed from the days when Bishop Burnet, who preached with an hour-glass running beside him, was requested by the whole congregation, when it ran out, to reverse it, and continue his discourse for a second hour! This appears to us quite mediæval, and yet it is but yesterday that the fashion of short services and shorter sermons has been insisted on by the taste of the day. Within our own memory, in Evangelical Dublin, a minister was not considered to have fulfilled his duty with a sermon under forty minutes; nor was an hour thought extravagant. We used to go to church at twelve, and continue there till a quarter past two o'clock. The service, with very little singing, and only regarded as a prelude to the sermon, was very slowly and reverently performed; and the

preacher, though always and on principle, choosing the same, or almost the same topic, dilated upon it at his leisure, and yet to the satisfaction of his people. Thus the modern impatience of preaching is of recent growth, and only recently attracting serious attention. But now the clergy may well say: *We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.*

All this is the ordinary worldly aspect of the matter; from the spiritual point of view the complaints are not only frequent, but far more serious. How often do we hear pious people complaining that they live in a dry and barren land, where no water is! How often do we see serious people vainly searching for deeper spiritual life, and complaining that when they ask for bread they receive but a stone! It is in fact only the simplest or the most old-fashioned congregations who are now-a-days satisfied with preaching, and who

regard it as a spiritual boon—I mean, of course, habitually ; for we may freely confess the exceptional delight which all occasionally feel when something striking is said, or a deep spiritual impression is made, from the pulpit. But then we say : Would to God ordinary preaching were like this ! This is what once reformed and regenerated the world.

§ 2. Is this a fair statement of the condition of the pulpit in these our days ? Has the censure conveyed been too hard or too sweeping ? It may seem so to those who count acquiescence as approval, and who think that regular attendance on the part of the congregation implies real interest. But alas ! most of this is mere conservatism ; it is the desire to be respectable and orderly, and to perform duties handed down from our forefathers. Nothing displeases the majority of our respectable people more than hearing their traditional religion questioned. They do

not wish to be forced to turn inwards and to analyse what amount of earnestness and what amount of real interest their regular devotions imply. They look upon such heart-searching as inexpedient and dangerous; it is likely to turn some people away from church altogether; it is likely to disquiet others, and render them less satisfied with themselves. Why disturb our most orderly habits with these questionings?

These are the arguments of those who say to themselves, *Peace, Peace*, when there is no peace. Immorality and crime are still rife after so many centuries of preaching; indifference and hypocrisy are on the increase. Is it not time to institute a thorough and searching inquiry, and see whether the decadence of the pulpit is necessary and inherent in the nature of things, or whether it is due to defects and difficulties which may be lessened or removed? Is it not time to consider whether the growing want of sympathy

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between the ordinary preacher and his congregation is due to his fault, or to theirs, or to the fault of both, or to the march of events which neither can control?

§ 3. The main result of such an inquiry should be to suggest practical hints for preachers, based upon historical and psychological grounds. People of great piety may despise such aids, and consider that the influence of the Spirit and the earnest desire of the pious teacher are sufficient, and more than sufficient, to endow a minister. Yet it is a fact that the aids given by human wisdom have been gladly accepted by the greatest teachers. Many a well-meaning Christian, for the very want of being wise as a serpent, has not been harmless as a dove, but mischievous to the great cause he rashly or feebly advocates. Surely all our faculties and all our powers deserve to be enlisted in this great service.

I will only add, that while the argu-

ments and illustrations which follow apply primarily to the Church which I desire loyally to serve, they will be general enough to afford suggestions to members of other sects, and even other religions. Nor will such readers find anything to offend them, unless it be an implication that their faith is mistaken. For I have assumed throughout that the preacher honestly believes his professed creed, and have avoided all discussion of heresy, as a different, though kindred, subject.

DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT.

§ 4. The causes of hindrance to the success of the pulpit are of three different kinds, which may be broadly distinguished, though in some respects they coincide, as most complicated agents on society are wont to do. We may class them as *historical*, as *social*, or as *personal*.

By historical causes are meant those

which depend on the great changes in human life and opinion produced by the course of ages; and hence they may, of all others, be fairly regarded as *necessary causes*, which we can hardly even modify, far less change, but upon which we must count, or rather, with which we must reckon, in attempting to solve the problem. So far as these causes are active the preacher is not in fault.

Social causes are those arising from the general action of society upon the pulpit,—an action depending on old tradition, and that curious unwritten law which has despotic force in all well-organised and long-established States. Though not necessary in the same strict sense as the former class, social causes are such as any single man can hardly overcome, for revolt against society on the part of an individual is always a desperate venture, generally ending in miserable failure; and this is more especially the case when the business of the

individual is to be in sympathy with society, and to influence it by affectionate persuasion. But however stern may be this despotism, it is not so inherent in the nature of things that it should not relax or change; and the weight of reasonable opinion, disseminated with earnestness and care, may induce such a change where it cannot be rudely enforced.

The last kind of hindrances are personal, and arise not from the outer circumstances, but from the character of the preacher. Most of these, derived from mistaken theories of preaching or from defects in education, can and ought to be remedied. Every attempt to advise and improve the preacher in these particulars ought therefore to be received with an honest desire to profit by it, and perhaps too little has been done to help theological students in this practical way.

But even were all these defects—those of mistaken training, or of false theory

— removed, there remain unfortunately hindrances which are practically insurmountable, wherever a large body of men must be employed in any kind of work. For a large body cannot consist of superior men, and must, when exceeding certain numerical limits, conform in ability and earnestness to the ordinary level or average of human nature. Now the average of human nature has neither the intellectual power nor the moral earnestness necessary for the profession of preaching. Hence, though a small sect may provide itself with adequate pulpit-power, it is impossible that a large or national Church should not count among its ministers a majority really unfit for the noble office of persuading their fellows to adopt a higher moral and religious life. And we shall see that it is a defect in the organisation of a Church to ignore this fact, and to insist upon all its ministers, at every religious service, attempting a

duty certain to be inadequately, or even badly, performed.

But this suggestion will find its place in the concluding sections, in which the *remedies* which are possible or practicable will be briefly noticed, and this with the view of helping those who feel themselves burdened with a weight which they cannot easily bear. The chief merit in such hints is to be practical, not to be new. It is not likely that novelties will be of much value to solve so old, and so anxiously-considered a difficulty.

I. HISTORICAL CAUSES.

§ 5. Nothing is more marked in most Christian preachers than the firmness with which they hold and declare that their form of faith was established once for all by its Founder, and that no change or modification whatever is to be tolerated by the orthodox. This rigid adherence to

the doctrines of Christianity is extended even to the very *form* in which it is preached, and nothing is thought better or more profitable than to repeat the old watchwords of those who once stirred the world to its depths. And yet, quite apart from the question of doctrine, to which we shall return presently, the circumstances of the world have so changed that some modification of the form of preaching would seem imperatively demanded.

Let us consider for a moment the position of the early missionaries of Christianity. They heralded a new faith, in an unknown god, to a public professing various forms of polytheism; they boldly claimed to have destroyed the reality and power of the Greek and Roman pantheons; they called upon their hearers to abandon all their old beliefs, their old ceremonies, their old offerings, and break absolutely with traditions which had been hallowed by the observance of centuries. To exclaim,

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, before such congregations, meant to expound to them the birth, life, and passion of an unknown deity, the teaching of a reformed and purified morality, the complete change of all their modes of life and thought. They were to hate father and mother and brethren for His sake; they were to quarrel with the whole civilised world, and set themselves apart as a peculiar society.

Such preaching had in it a boldness and a novelty which must have been most striking to all that heard it. The man who proclaimed it must have acquired a thorough confidence in his message; he must have felt a strange enthusiasm and excitement in telling his 'good news;' and they who were weary with seeking a better spiritual life, who found no peace in the teaching of heathendom, must have felt a strange interest in this wonderful message. This was the significance of the great formula; this was the ground

of its perpetual repetition. By itself it had then no meaning; it required full and explicit commentary; it was the brief standing text of a long discourse.

Nothing can replace for the modern preacher these unique advantages, unless he too is the advocate of a new faith, and even then, what new faith could show the splendid and pathetic surroundings of the cradle of Christianity? But the orthodox preacher, who is merely expounding received dogmas to his hearers, who tells them what they know very well already,—nay, who is regarded with suspicion or dislike if he ventures on anything new,—how can he hope to rival the early pioneers of his creed? It is indeed unreasonable to expect it. He cannot possibly have the same force, or arouse the same interest and excitement about his discourses; and so far the complaint against him means only this, that times have changed, and that most men are not now adherents of

some old and decrepit religion. Indeed, it is the very successes and conquests of his forerunners which have rendered his task less splendid and striking.

Let us, however, add, that if he expects the very formula which then reformed the world to have the same kind of effect now, he is guilty of the same kind of anachronism as the objector. To exclaim to a company of Christians, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*, is to tell them to do what they already profess to do. They are not asked to abandon any other gods, any diverse ritual, any hallowed observances. In its ordinary acceptation, this grand appeal is now a mere truism, and the preacher has to refine upon it, and treat its terms with subtlety; he has to devise a new sense for the term *belief*, and so secure for his text a new interest to make up for what it has lost. Originally, to believe in Jesus meant simply to give such credence to the facts of His life, and

His claims to more than human origin, as to displace all other religions and beliefs, and dethrone other gods. Nor was this great sacrifice likely to be made by any people not in earnest about the change. Now we are told that intellectual belief is one thing, and *saving* belief another; that we must believe in the latter sense, and not in the former only, not with the head, but with the heart.

I will not dispute one word of this. All I contend for is that such subtle distinctions will not lay hold of the world as the old preaching did. There is a necessary decrease in the power of preaching from the loss of novelty in its creed. This is enhanced by the stubborn adherence to old formulæ, and to aphorisms which, if they have not lost their meaning, have become mere truisms. The preaching of the eighteenth century is *in form* not the best preaching for the nineteenth. How much less is the preaching of the second century

a model for those who desire now to reform the world! No employment of second century formulæ, with the aid of new and subtle meanings, will satisfy the present need of spiritual help and direction.

§ 6. This is all the more certain, owing to the great change caused by the development of history,—nay, by the influence of Christianity itself on the intellectual, and perhaps in the moral, relations of the preacher and his hearers. And in this place we must broadly distinguish between the more educated people and the ignorant masses, which are yet but partially remodelled by the course of civilisation. Taking first the educated classes,—a very large body now-a-days, and often reaching down to the artizan or servant, who reads his newspaper and hears the conversation of enlightened people,—there is no longer a difference of intellectual level between the preacher and his audience. He is no longer standing forth, if not an inspired,

at least an authorised and authoritative teacher, who knows vastly more, and can speak vastly better, than those who hear him. Nor is he their only instructor, upon whose guidance they must depend for all their spiritual sustenance. They can read other opinions; they can search the Scriptures, even in the original. They can criticise the preacher's arguments and correct his mistakes. They are apt to come to church, not to be led and instructed, but to approve or disapprove, according as their critical judgment leads them. They are furnished in books and journals with theological matter in a more elegant form than most preachers can command; their private judgment is exercised to the fullest measure of liberty, if not of license. If a second Paul were to stand forth to this people, even though they had the discretion or the good taste not to mock, they would say to him calmly, *We will hear thee again of this matter.*

To such people, preaching—at least regular, every-Sunday preaching—is well-nigh useless, and for all practical purposes an anachronism. No doubt most of them will not confess it; they take it as a very mild spiritual stimulant; they like it as affording scope for their criticism; they even like it in order that they may express their approval of piety, of earnestness, or of learning. But it is not true that this class, as a class, intends or desires to be reformed and enlightened by preaching. Nor can we see how its growth could have been precluded by any efforts of the Church, any more than the existence of Stoics and Epicureans, who listened to St. Paul with idle curiosity, or contempt.

The case may best be illustrated by the success of missions over the world. With the rarest exceptions, missionaries only produce large effects when preaching to a people below them in mind and culture,—not too far below them, for then

preachers become unintelligible, and speak of spiritual things to creatures who hardly know what a spirit means,—but below them so far as to look up with veneration to the preacher as a man of superior learning and higher moral aims.

Thus no missions are attempted, for example, to the professors at the German universities, though they are believed by Evangelical Christians to require conversion as much as any class in the world. But their intellectual level is too high, and, like the Brahmins in India, they look with contempt upon the most earnest and pious missionary, because they believe he has not thought, or is not capable of thinking, as deeply on spiritual subjects as they.

§ 7. There may occur to many readers the somewhat random but common statement, that 'the world was originally converted by twelve ignorant fishermen.' It is often alleged that the deepest earthly wisdom is confounded by the power of

spiritual insight in the poor and the ignorant,—that to babes and sucklings are revealed things hidden from the wise and prudent. Nothing is more misleading than this too common practice of dealing out texts instead of arguments. Granting that the original preachers of Christianity were ignorant men, they were endowed with miraculous powers, and were able to enforce their doctrine with signs in a manner wholly impossible to the modern preacher. It might as well be argued that the leading feature in Christ's own preaching was His humble human origin. His divine powers outbalanced a thousandfold the advantages which could have been acquired by all the culture of the day. A poor and ignorant man, with miraculous powers to aid him, affords by his success no guarantee that poverty and ignorance are favourable conditions for preaching.[1] If, therefore,

[1] These are of use in two respects only : in securing a certain freshness and directness, which is generally lost

these twelve ignorant fishermen, led by a carpenter's son, had converted the world, it is idle to assert that any other party of ignorant men, *as such*, could convert the mass of men superior to them in knowledge and culture. The capital feature is omitted in all such arguments.

But it is high time to add that the statement itself is historically false, and that the world was not converted by a set of ignorant fishermen. As soon as the preaching of Christianity began to extend beyond the narrow bounds of Palestine, was it entrusted to such preachers? Nothing of the kind. There is a chosen vessel selected, a man born in a famous university town (Tarsus), versed in the Stoic philosophy, as his sermons amply show,[1]—learned,

by long reflection on dogmas and difficulties; in catching the sympathy of the masses for a man of like passions and of like mental standing with themselves.

[1] St. Paul's sermon at Athens, for example, is nothing but a statement of the Stoical morality, with the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the Resurrection superadded. And it

besides, in all the wisdom of the Jewish schools. He associates with him men like Apollos, skilled rhetoricians; he seeks the aid of all the culture of the day to enforce his doctrine. And even before Paul, or apart from him, there was a spirit of learning at work in the earliest teachers of the Church. Consider the fourth Gospel. If its author had been originally an ignorant fisherman, he was something very different when he penned his account of the life of Christ. He is learned in the subtleties of neo-Platonism; he knows the metaphysics of Alexandria; and unless we adopt the crudest theory of verbal inspiration, and hold that he wrote down things which he did not understand, we must confess that here too we have advanced learning and

is quite plain that if these were his precise words, he was arguing on the Stoical side against the Epicurean, just as he took the Pharisee's side against the Sadducee on a memorable occasion. Any one who knows what the Stoic theodicy and morals were, cannot possibly deny this.

high culture employed in the early propagation of Christian doctrine.

If, then, high culture and education were necessary even then to give effect to preaching, how much more necessary must they be now? For there were other reasons at that age of the world why a mere revivalist preacher, a mere herald of new doctrine, must have an influence denied him now. Not only were the world's faiths and creeds then waning and passing into decay, but there was in most of them a spirit of tolerance, a spirit of indifference, which admitted without scruple the claims of a rival creed. Provided that a new cult did not assert itself exclusively, — provided it did not directly conflict with the established worship,—the nations of that day were rather disposed to regard it as a varying form of the same thing, a new name for the old gods, a special revelation to one nation of the truths revealed in common to all mankind. And this led

people dissatisfied with their own religion to inquire into novelties of dogma with an earnestness and an interest now unknown or reprobated. When they found that Christianity would tolerate no rival and admit of no identification with other faiths, then came the struggle which has already been noticed ; but the first heralding of a new faith was received with far different feelings from those with which we regard the claims of any revelation which could be, or which has been, made in our times.

§ 8. And, apart from the inclusiveness and cosmopolitanism of heathen theology, there were features in life and society which made men more anxious generally for some revelation which would bring peace to their troubled hearts, and hope of future rest from the tumults of life. Christianity, and with it modern civilisation, have so quieted down the wild passions and conflicts of men, that now most of us lead a sober and peaceful life, with little fear that

we shall be disturbed in our homes, or in the still course of our life, by the invasion of enemies, or the far worse inroads of the tyrant and his minions.

But we must remember that in the decay of the old world injustice and violence were common, and it was no strange or exceptional thing to pass from peace and prosperity into hopeless misery and slavery. If in our day a hostile army invades a country, even the soldiery is obliged to respect the rights of unarmed people, and many of the defenceless victims escape with no greater damage than the loss of money, of movable property, and of their domestic comforts. In old times, when women and children brought a price in the market as slaves, and were regarded as the lawful spoil of the conqueror,—when the butchering of prisoners in battle, though hardly the rule, was not only allowable but even frequent,—then indeed the terrors of war were far different from

anything that now threatens civilised people. Even the Roman peace did not secure outlying provinces from these terrors; and at home, when they had disappeared save in days of revolution (and these not by any means rare), we know that the cruel despotism of many emperors produced a horrible uncertainty not less destructive than war of that sense of security which is our greatest earthly blessing. Hence thoughtful men in the first ages of Christianity were driven by their circumstances to seek spiritual peace and a spiritual liberty beyond the chances of war and the caprice of tyrants, with an eagerness not easily to be appreciated in modern society.

§ 9. So, then, it has been shown that by reason of historical necessities, some of which are beyond our control, and others produced by the very successes of preaching itself, it is impossible that the pulpit should now hold the great position as an engine of moral reform and culture which

it once undoubtedly occupied. The loss of all novelty in the subject, the gain in learning and intelligence among the congregations, and the quiet and undisturbed flow of our modern life, which is rarely stirred up by seasons of intense excitement, —all these causes have produced their effect, and it is impossible to undo it.

II. Social Causes.

§ 10. The settled and calm course of modern life, however, suggests to us that the causes hitherto assigned are only part of the obstacles to the success of modern preaching, and that, apart from the great historical agents already discussed, there exist social hindrances, whose influence is more proximate, and often more deeply felt. They are not indeed necessary in the strict sense, inasmuch as they depend on social arrangements which may be reversed, and which we may even hope to

see reversed, by a proper education of public opinion. Nevertheless, to the individual preacher they are bonds which tie him to a certain routine with irresistible force, and perhaps nowhere does *he* feel a greater and more stringent necessity. They are therefore to be placed on debatable ground between the necessary and the contingent obstacles to the success of preaching, and as such naturally find their place in this part of the discussion.

I need hardly insist that the older and more settled a society, the more surely will the majority of its members adopt a certain fixed course of life, regulating even the most trivial details with a sullen uniformity. We find it in dress, in the hours of eating and sleeping, in the daily round, not only of business, which must be uniform, but of pleasure, which ought not to be so. This is that King *Nomos* of whom Plato speaks as the real ruler of society; it is the *Deb* of the Turcoman

nomad, who fixes even his rude life according to its unwritten behests. But nations differ in the intensity of their devotion to it, or in the invariability, it may be, of their acquiescence—often a heedless acquiescence,—till some one dares to violate it, when they quickly enforce the law by unwritten, but not the less stringent, penalties. Let a man change but the cut of his coat or the height of his hat, and he is not only pursued by ridicule, but is censured by grave people as guilty of eccentricity,—the unpardonable sin of modern society,—and therefore as generally untrustworthy in the serious affairs of life.

In no case is this feeling more tyrannical or exacting than in the ordinary observances of religion. The smallest variation from the usual practice in our services excites the ire of the orthodox. Even those otherwise careless in religion and lax in morality pose as the guardians of purity and uniformity in ritual. But we

are not here concerned with ritual in its ordinary sense. We are here occupied with the social uniformity which asserts its authority over the preacher more than Rubrics or even Articles, which insists that he shall submit to the dictates of a society which cares not to be disturbed, which hates to be alarmed, and which desires little more from the pulpit than a confirmation of its prejudices.

Thus he is required, on fixed and very frequent occasions, however indisposed or empty he may feel as regards teaching, to ascend a narrow pulpit, where he has no power of movement or action. Indeed all action more violent than that of speaking very loud, or thumping the cushion before him, is prohibited, and even these symptoms of energy have come to be considered excessive and ill-bred. He is obliged to find a text of Scripture from which to draw his lessons, even though there be none exactly appropriate, and

though he be forced to employ many quibbles and subtleties to graft on his discourse to the text. He is not to speak too loud or too low; he must not be too long or too short: if the former, he offends the worldly and idle, who only come to church from habit, and desire to escape as soon as may be convenient; if the latter, he annoys the serious and respectable people, who think that such brevity reflects on the importance of his subject. If he employs anecdotes and descends to particulars, in order to give colour to his sermon, he is thought familiar; if he keeps to dogma only, he is thought dry. In fact, every sort of departure from a fixed *norma*, a fixed way of speaking, a fixed way of thinking, is resented by some section of his congregation.

§ 11. Above all, to be amusing is a great crime. The shadow of puritanism still hangs over our churches, and if a generation ago all ornament in churches was

thought to savour of worldliness or of false doctrine, so all levity, as it is called, is considered as excluded by the solemnity of the subject. And yet men pleading for life and death, for great issues of poverty and wealth, for great party struggles which involve the weal and woe of millions, do not disdain to attract and to divert their audience by an appeal to that peculiarly human quality, the faculty of laughter. There is no orator in the world, speaking on the subject nearest to his heart, and most vital to those he addresses, who avoids this great help to persuasion, except the preacher. To him, while wit is wholly inadmissible, even humour is only allowed in the form of bitterness and sarcasm, the very forms which are really most unsuitable to his sacred office.

There is, moreover, a large section of Christians, who will not tolerate any variety of subject, who think that the preacher has but one message to bring, and that so

paramount in importance, that every moment not devoted to it is lost or wasted, and they require him to repeat this message every Sunday of his life.

Such are the bonds of uniformity with which modern society trammels the preacher, and from which only a strong and exceptional nature can free itself. The average preacher, who feels no special force or originality, never even thinks of struggling against them; and so, if we walk into any strange place of worship, we may anticipate, in nine cases out of ten, exactly the sort of thing we shall hear. It will be respectable and commonplace, delivered with a voice and tone implying official seriousness. It will generally be all true, when not too narrow, and it will be excellent advice for people to follow. But we also know that in nine cases out of ten, we shall see plainly that most of the congregation may feel acquiescence in it all, but no interest. Modern society

has done its best to make preaching a perfunctory duty, and it has succeeded. People even play the part so well as to deny with not unreal indignation the truth of this picture. They assert boldly enough that to them preaching is a source of spiritual profit and moral good. But the facts remain. Wherever preaching still retains its life and power, it is an exception to the rule; and the rule, at least in established churches, is very much as above described.

§ 12. It is, I think, an effect of this same tendency that serious debate is excluded from our pulpits. Any rival statements of doctrine are carefully avoided, and any preacher who should admit to his pulpit an opponent of his views, and carry on a real debate, even at intervals of a week between charge and counter-charge, would be thought to violate all propriety. Is not each minister supposed to teach the whole truth, and would not the admission that his statements were open to refutation destroy

his authority as a teacher? Such is the feeling, and hence, though rival teachers may reply to each other by hint and innuendo, and it be understood that one discourse is an answer to another, no really honest or serious debate is possible. This depends to a great extent on the nature of the subject, and the claims to certainty made by religious people who teach. It may be, therefore, a necessary defect in the sermons of an established church, and one for which its preachers are not to be blamed.

But then we allow ourselves controversy, and it is not unusual to hear from the pulpit a criticism of some new theological work, or of a rival system. Indeed, the most interesting and striking sermons I have ever heard were of this kind; they were the controversial discourses against Popery, which were once usual in all the evangelical churches of Dublin, and which were undertaken by the ablest men. These discourses were generally on week-day

evenings ; the preacher was allowed some license of illustration and argument, and though the churches were chiefly crowded with Protestants who came to hear their own orthodoxy and superiority to their Catholic brethren demonstrated, it was not unusual for Roman Catholics to enter unsuspected, and hear what was to be said against their faith. These sermons had real life in them. The speaker was combating what was felt a great and pressing evil ; he had the warm sympathies of his congregation ; he was allowed ample time for his discourse ; and though he had no opponent there to contradict him, or to repudiate the strange travesties of Romish doctrine he often presented to his hearers, there was at least some semblance of a discussion.

§ 13. To revert for a moment to the subject of the last chapter, does not this popularity and interest of controversy show the mighty influence exercised by the first Christian preachers, when there was a great

conflict of rival faiths, and when men met to consider, not the ordinary lessons of a religion in which all were agreed, but the life or death of a whole creed, the establishment of a whole system of doctrine, the reality of a whole body of alleged facts?

But now our congregations are somewhat weary of controversy. They cannot work themselves up to take a keen part in the argument. They say it is all very well to argue one side, when you have no one to answer on the other. They say that it is rather the duty of the preacher to enforce truth than to seek out and expose error. Many a stumbling-block to the faith, they add, would be unknown to the people, if the preacher did not quote it from an adversary, often without the power of removing it satisfactorily. All this is evidence, I think, of a waning in true interest about religion, in real anxiety about the spreading and confirming of the faith. And it is not very logical that this spirit,

which is so great an obstacle to effective preaching, should set people to turn upon the very ordinance which they are depriving of its power, and charge it with debility and decay.

§ 14. But the tyranny of social circumstances does not merely lie in wait for the preacher when he ascends his pulpit ; it follows him into everyday life, and imposes upon him such conditions as react unfavourably upon his sermons. The ministry of most modern forms of religion is no longer a celibate, but a married order ; and so strong is the objection to the usage of the Church of Rome in Protestant churches, that celibacy is positively disliked, and we may assume the preacher to be a family man, living in the midst of his people. It is no part of the present subject to discuss generally the advantages or disadvantages of celibacy in the clergy. No doubt there are many drawbacks and difficulties in such a restriction, and it may be that

those people who, after a young clergyman has remained some years in a parish, positively complain of him if he does not marry, have some weighty reasons on their side.

But from the point of view of preaching, there can be little doubt that married life creates great difficulties and hindrances. The distractions caused by sickness and other human misfortunes increase necessarily in proportion to the number of the household; and as the clergy in all countries are likely to have large families, the time which might be spent in meditation on their discourses is stolen from them by other duties and other cares. The Catholic priest, when his daily round of outdoor duties is over, comes home to a quiet study, where there is nothing to disturb his thoughts. The family man is met at his door by troops of children welcoming his return, and claiming his interest in all their little affairs. Or else the disagreements of the household demand him as an um-

pire, and his mind is disturbed by no mere speculative contemplation of the faults and follies of mankind, but by their actual invasion of his home. Hence it is that the weekly sermon is so often scamped, or copied hurriedly from some diverse thinker, so that it fits him badly, and sounds hollow and foreign in his mouth.

Need we add that the defects of his family, the mistakes of his wife and children, his own foibles in daily life, any chance scandal in the house, for which he may not be to blame,—all these things, seen by his neighbours and discussed in the parish, must necessarily take from the weight of his exhortations in the pulpit. If he maintains, as he is bound, an ideal standard in his teaching; if he inveighs against the lesser faults of men, and urges upon his hearers the higher spiritual life, they are ready enough to retort that his own household does not show forth an adequate illustration of his precepts. They

will say, *Physician, heal thyself;* the wonders which he would work in the homes of others should first be shown under his own roof.

All this is really irrelevant and unfair. It is absurd to say that a man should not aim at things higher than he can perform; it is absurd that hindrances which he is often really unable to overcome should be charged to him as personal shortcomings. But it is not the less true, that in this case familiarity breeds contempt, and the preacher must be a very rare personage, and blessed with a very rare wife and children, if they prove no hindrance to the power of his sermons. That there are such exceptional cases must be freely and thankfully admitted. There are men whose daily life, far from injuring their eloquence, is its real and even its only source, so that when a stranger hears them he wonders at the earnestness of their crowded congregations. These men live their sermon

through the week ; they show forth in their conduct the ensample of a holy life. If the great majority of preachers were of this kind the present essay would have little practical use. But we are dealing with the average,—both the average preacher and the average congregation,—and it is with these we must reckon and balance the account. For it is quite certain that there is no prospect of the mass of the ministry in any large or national Church ever rising to so high a level. They must be men of like intellects, like passions, like character, to most of mankind.

To such the settled family life of our clergy is a great obstacle, and indeed the course of history shows that the most eminently striking and successful preachers have been celibate monks and anchorites, living apart from the world, assumed by the crowd from their ascetic life to be of exceptional sanctity, and flashing upon the people at intervals from their holy seclusion. Such

were Peter the Hermit, and Savonarola, and John the Baptist. When men of a different type have attained to a like eminence it has generally been as itinerant preachers, whose roving life prevented any long familiarity with their domestic concerns, or their ordinary moments, so that by this expedient they exalted themselves practically to the condition of celibates, only known to their hearers when they appeared as heralds of great truths and denouncers of prevailing sin.

§ 15. Thus, then, modern society lays its shackles about the preacher, and entwines him in a net of conditions most unfavourable for his office. He is placed, so to speak, in a house of glass in the middle of his people; he is encouraged to surround himself with a family, thus giving hostage after hostage, not only to fortune, but to criticism; so that it is a marvel if he can come before his audience without a consciousness on his part that they know his

foibles and discuss his failures, and a consciousness on theirs, that though now it is for him to warn and to censure, they can, during the week, repay him his exhortations, perhaps with interest. This, indeed, may be one reason why the clergy find it necessary to occupy their discourses either with the explanation of dogmas, or with such general reflections as will not encourage a retort. But, if so, they lose in directness, and consequently in power. No man will be great as a teacher who is felt to be avoiding the burning topics of the day.

It is to be noted in limitation of these remarks that the evil is worst in the best society, and where the congregation is on a level with, or even above, the preacher. Those who have the privilege of teaching simple rustics or rude mechanics are indeed subject to criticism, and will have any scandal in their family very roughly censured; but they are less likely to have

their ordinary life microscopically examined, and made the subject of minute daily gossip. Still, even here, the feeling that the man is smaller than his profession, —that the teacher of ideal virtues is no paragon himself,—mars the gospel in his mouth, and makes men tolerate him for his office sake, not for his personal weight. Great preachers, like great saints, will overcome all this. Would they were more numerous!

III. PERSONAL CAUSES.

§ 16. We come now to those personal causes, which are for the most part not necessary, but the fault of individuals, and it is here accordingly that we may fairly expect to suggest some practical improvement. But though most of the hindrances we are now to discuss be contingent on the preacher's own faults, even here there are personal defects for which he can hardly be blamed;

they are the result of his parentage and his education. Thus it is usually the fault of some reckless or foolish marriage that he grows up a sickly or a stupid child; it is the fault of his parents that whatever faculties he has are not developed by proper education. It is unfair to ascribe these defects, though personal, to the man himself, and call them faults which he might avoid. Yet, on the other hand, some of them can be either avoided or lessened, both by his own care and the care of those who train him, so that even here, from a wider point of view, we may regard them as for the most part remediable.

The greatest and most constant, which tells against all professions, is *want of ability*. But while this is conceded elsewhere, on preaching it is common enough to cite texts about *confounding the wise*, about being *puffed up with human knowledge*, about administering the pure gospel as *milk to babes*, and many other true

and inspired texts which are in this connection wholly irrelevant. We shall consider in due time the paramount value of piety and simplicity in a preacher, and I trust no one will accuse me of underrating them. But this must be insisted upon, that want of brains is a capital defect, and that no amount of moral excellence will make a stupid man a successful preacher. He may, by his firmness of character, his purity of life, his unaffected piety, attain such influence that he may appear to those who know him to have power in the pulpit. But this, as has been said already, is not really preaching; it is living his sermon,—a very noble thing it is, nobler, no doubt, than any preaching;—and if we could secure a majority of such men, it would follow not so much that the pulpit would gain in power, as that it would lose in importance.

But in discussing preaching as such,—in discussing the reasons that make it weak and ineffectual,—we are bound to note

direct causes as prior to indirect, and of the direct causes there is none more serious than want of ability in our preachers. No doubt the majority of mankind is wanting in this quality; the average of intellect is low, and most people are very dull; but when we find so many men professing to teach from the pulpit who are totally unable to frame a sustained argument,—nay, more, unable to understand it when put before them,—we cannot but conclude that the abler young men of our day do not adopt this profession, and that our preachers, as a body, are below even the average in intellect. I remember very well—indeed painfully well—a class of divinity students which I instructed in the Epistle to the Romans, and after labouring a whole term with all possible care, and making them go over the argument, and write it out, and rehearse it, they confessed to me in a body at the end of the term that they had made no advance in it

whatever, for that *none of them was able to follow an argument.* They were not many, —eight, I think,—and such a case only occurred to me once in many years' teaching; but in every year there were some men of this kind—men who deliberately adopted the profession of religious teaching, with the consciousness that they could not possibly understand what they had to teach. They were, in fact, adopting this profession because they were too dull for any other.

If it is no wonder on the one hand that such men produce no effect, and bring preaching into disrepute, on the other it is not the least surprising that the ministry should be regarded as suitable for a stupid man. In most forms of settled religion intellectual ability does not receive the reward it deserves and gains in other walks of life. In religion people are conservative; they dislike novelty and change, and cleverness is akin to a disposition

for new views. Throughout most of a minister's duties moral qualities are naturally far more appreciated. Moreover great ability leads him to seek wider influence, to declare himself on politics and public affairs, to burst the trammels which society has placed around him. Hence society has itself banished intellect from its pulpits, and now complains that their teaching is dull!

There are creeds or sections of churches, like the Dominican Order, and the Free Church of Scotland, in which ability in the pulpit leads to great eminence and a high public position. Accordingly, these churches or orders have never wanted men of intellect in considerable numbers. But, generally speaking, how few men of talent turn to preaching! How rare it is to go casually into the religious service of any creed and hear a really able discourse—a discourse which, apart from the special dogmas propounded, or the external gifts

of the speaker, shows a real grasp of his subject? No doubt he is hampered by the social causes already discussed; he is limited to a subject so well worn that, but for its native majesty and indestructible importance, one might venture to call it threadbare. Yet all these obstacles might be, and are, overcome if a man of intellect undertakes the task. It lies then with society, which criticises the preacher, to reform this defect, and see that the task is entrusted to men of talent. No other quality will make a man an effective teacher of those superior to him in intelligence. They may follow him for the novelty of his doctrine, or the firmness of his character, or the piety of his life; but when he shocks their intellects by want of common sense, or by a display of bad logic,—in fact, as soon as they feel that he is stupid,—he will generally fail to reach their hearts or stir them to higher and purer lives.

§ 17. If he does so, it will be by means

of a mental quality far rarer even than intellect—the quality of leading men by strength of will or character. This capital source of influence is generally combined with some intellect, though many men of intellect have it not; we may even admit that great subtlety of mind is hardly compatible with it. But there are rare cases where a man, endowed with but moderate intellectual ability, has this curious force in him,—a something hard to define, not necessarily resulting from exceeding honesty, or piety, or unselfishness, though generally coupled with these,—a mental quality which we know by its effects, for it always marks out its possessor as a leader of men. It is, however, so rare that we need hardly take account of it in discussing the general conditions of preaching.

Here we mention this force for a different reason. Because it is sometimes coupled with piety, with that unselfishness which follows from the devotion to the

higher life, we might imagine that piety is the real spring of this commanding power; and hence most religious people, if asked what they thought was the main cause of the modern decay in preaching, would answer directly that the main cause was *want of piety;* and that if this want were supplied, all the arguments of the present argument might be laid aside as idle talk.

Thus we come to a quality of the first importance to the preacher, and one which has been postponed to this chapter only because its logical place forbade us to approach it at the outset.

§ 18. We need only consider the number of cases in which men of real piety fail to interest or to influence their congregations, to demonstrate that this quality *by itself* is quite insufficient to produce the effects generally attributed to it. But we cannot so easily convince serious and religious people that, though of vast importance, it is not really an essential to good preaching.

Yet there have been, there are, and there will be, great and effective preachers who are not remarkable for piety. This will more readily be granted when we consider preaching by itself, and take instances from those orders and churches where this duty is isolated from other functions, and where the man who occupies the pulpit is not at other times in close relation to his hearers.

The opposite and prevalent opinion is based altogether on our experience of resident or parochial clergy, whose weekly duties are more important than their sermons. These men, as has already been explained, live under the closest supervision, and if their daily life contrasts with the ideal aspirations which they inculcate, and ought to inculcate, upon their hearers, the discord between their precept and their example is immediately felt, and they are set down as something like hypocrites, or at least as men so inconsistent that their counsels have no weight. So it is that the diffi-

culties of modern preaching react upon each other, and are so closely related that the discussion of each suggests the others. If we regard the preacher merely as such, we must take him in that position *by itself*, and consider him just as he is in his pulpit, or as strangers would judge him who heard him for the first time. It is not necessary that he should possess personal piety, or presuppose it in himself. He may give great expositions of dogma; he may give splendid exhortations to a holy life; and, provided he be really in earnest,—provided his enthusiasm be not fictitious, or his earnestness assumed,—he may be a great champion of his faith. For he may feel all the value of goodness, he may sincerely believe in the truth and value of his creed and yet he may not have attained that inner calm of the soul, that closer walk with God, which is the privilege of the very few among men.

§ 19. It may seem strange to insist upon

the non-essential character of piety; nay, it may seem to many that any one anxious for the reform of the pulpit cannot possibly put too much stress upon it, for that, whether it be logically an essential or not, it is practically the great thing to attain in all the relations of life. So strong will this feeling be in many readers, that they will possibly attribute want of religious earnestness to the man who detracts in aught from the paramount importance of this condition. But in a survey of this matter on philosophic grounds we must not despise logical questions, for we may be sure that if we do, it will lead somewhere to mistakes in practice. This is particularly the case with the facts now under discussion.

In the first place, if intense piety in every preacher affords the only hope of a reform and rehabilitation of the pulpit, we may give up the case as lost. For the history of our race shows that intense piety or complete devotion to the will

and service of God is far rarer than even great moral purity or great intellectual ability. It is the attainment or privilege of the few. A great spiritual outburst, such as that predicted by the prophet Joel, is simply miraculous, and therefore does not come within the prospect of human speculation.

Secondly, apart from these general considerations, the belief that this piety is an indispensable requisite for religious teaching hinders many of our best and most earnest men from undertaking that duty in their church, and thus actually injures the cause for which it is so scrupulous. The man who hesitates because he feels no consuming ardour for the propagation of his faith and the moral improvement of his fellows, often shows by his very hesitation the high ideal he has of his duty, and so far, his very fitness for the calling which he abandons. If he were persuaded that in this, as in other professions, earnestness and diligence

are sufficient moral conditions, he would certainly become a useful member of the ministry, possibly an eminent one, and his enthusiasm would increase with his closer knowledge of the great work upon which he had entered.

There is a certain inconsistency in our judgment about the ministry of Christian Churches. On the one hand, most of the ordination services postulate an inward calling in the candidate,—a special motion of the Spirit: they do not recognise any other motive as lawful, and assume that the clergy of the Church are, each and all, men who are constrained by a Divine impulse to enter upon their duties. The general public, on the other hand, and the majority even of serious parents, regard the ministry as a profession to be ranked with law or medicine, and they assume that any man who feels a turn for it, in the ordinary sense of the word, is entitled to enter it. This is indeed a true

and practical view, because, if the higher requirement were maintained, so few would dare to present themselves as to render our pulpits empty, and the maintenance of our churches impossible. Even the most pious bishop would hesitate to enforce such a condition, were he given an insight into the hearts of the candidates ; nor would he venture to reject those who were honestly disposed to do their duty as professional men, without possessing a higher calling.

This inconsistency of view is a very serious thing, and contributes not a little to weaken the power of our modern preaching. For the candidate often enters upon his duties with this stain upon his conscience, that his ordination presupposes far higher motives and a far purer character than he feels himself to possess. He stands at the threshold of his ministry with the jar of this discord within him. He starts with the consciousness of a false position ; or still worse, he settles for him-

self that the requirement of the high ideal is but a formal demand, which expects no fulfilment. Is it any wonder that with these antecedents his preaching is unreal, and his life without earnestness? Yet such are the results which might be produced by over-strictness in demanding the quality of piety in our preachers.

This criticism does not apply to preaching only; it is equally true in the case of all the higher offices in our churches, which require sense and vigour in dealing with human affairs. Thus we need not hesitate to affirm that an honest and sensible, though worldly man, if endowed with a quick insight into character, would make a better bishop, in the strictest sense of *better*, than a simple and unintellectual man of the deepest piety, whose very devotion to things unseen leaves him liable to deception by hypocrites, and to mistakes in action through the influence of selfish and designing men.

The latter would be a better Christian, no doubt,—a purer example to those who could contemplate his private life,—but a worse bishop than his worldly brother.

§ 20. It will be hard to prevent illogical readers—and they are many—from thinking that these reservations to the paramount claims of piety imply a want of appreciation of its dignity and beauty. It is indeed most ungrateful to urge anything against that one feature in mankind, so rare, so holy, so majestic, that in this, and in this alone, we may be said to approach the perfection of a future state. To say that such a quality gives weight to a man's teaching, adds conviction to his arguments, disarms the criticism of his mistakes, lends an ineffable charm to his persuasion, is to state mere truisms in which all will concur. It is indeed absurd to say that without education, without any natural gifts, without special training, it will make a man preach well or elo-

quently. But its influence, especially in a fixed society, where its beauty radiates incessantly on those around it, is always vast and constant, and we may safely agree with those who declare that with the increase of this grace our preaching will gain in power and effect, and that without it general success will be impossible. We have made our reservations; we have stated our limitations; let no one imagine that on this account we underrate the value of piety. It is a gift of the Spirit, rare, like genius; without a miracle it will never become common among men, but the oftener it occurs, the more certainly will the power and the persuasion of preaching increase throughout the world.

IV. PERSONAL CAUSES—*Continued.*

§ 21. But if piety without ability, or piety without firmness of character, is very often

an unsafe guide in human affairs, so piety without learning is seldom of much effect in the pulpit. I do not merely mean that general learning, without which all speakers become thin and jejune, and weary their hearers with constant repetitions and with platitudes. This is indeed important, and requires considerable leisure and ability for its acquisition. But we must lay even more stress on that special theological training, without which no man, in any religion, or reasonable system of theology, can properly teach and explain to his congregation the dogmas they should believe and the duties they should perform. It will be well to spend a few moments in considering the necessity of both forms of learning to the modern preacher.

§ 22. As to the first or general culture, all good rhetoricians, from Greek days to our own, have ever insisted upon its necessity. The two men who tell us most about the art of eloquence in Greece,—Isocrates and

Aristotle,—put it in the foreground. The proper invention of striking ideas, though in part depending on natural ability, depends still more on having the mind fully stocked with all kinds of knowledge, from which to draw, like the householder out of his treasure, things new and old. Cicero and Quintilian, the greatest names among the Romans, in practical and theoretical rhetoric, insist upon the same thing.

I remember seeing the most popular evangelical preacher of his day in Ireland borrowing an encyclopædia from a friend, who asked him what need he, a busy and devoted minister, could have for such a book. He answered that it was necessary to keep storing his mind with all manner of information, otherwise he could not make his sermons interesting to his hearers. This was a practical man, a man of sound common sense, as well as of deep piety. He had probably never read the advices of Aristotle and Cicero;

he felt out the right theory by his native intelligence.

This general culture is all the more necessary now that our congregations have become more educated, and naturally desire an intellectual flavour in their spiritual food. For if the preacher be inferior in culture to his hearers,—and this he cannot fail to show every time he addresses them,—he is more likely to excite contempt than respect. This is particularly the case when his ignorance leads him to make blunders in his allusions or illustrations, to show credulousness or scepticism in the wrong place as regards physical laws and matters of history—nay, even to cite facts or names inaccurately, and show that they are only known to him by accident and from inferior sources. These trifles often destroy the effect of a good and solid discourse, and are among the most common causes of that contempt and indifference shown by the educated

world to our ordinary preaching. This is the proper vindication of those bishops or churches that insist upon their clergy undergoing an university training previous to ordination. Even this is, of course, quite insufficient. The mere passing of an arts' course is only the first beginning of an education, but it *is* the beginning; and a man who has thus overcome the first obstacles to acquiring information, and knows the grammar of language and the rudiments of science, can afterwards, without any excessive tax upon his powers, go on towards the higher culture which will give him power as a public speaker.

§ 23. We may pass from this topic to the special training required in theology by means of an intermediate branch of study, not peculiar to theologians, and yet a special study in itself—the study of rhetoric. And here perhaps the intelligent public will not be so ready to agree with me as on the former requisite. The general

want of culture is admitted to be one of the greatest and most constant causes of failure in the pulpit; but people are not so ready to acknowledge the usefulness of the special study of public speaking as such to the preacher. For we moderns differ in this completely from the ancients. To them *extempore* speaking was very rare and exceptional; indeed it would have been thought disrespectful to a serious audience. They studied and analysed the nature of persuasion by logical clearness, by elegant expression, by appropriate emotion, by graceful action. They were successful, too, in their efforts, for they produced models of eloquence which have served the world ever since, and which will probably never be excelled. It may also be assumed that these, the work of great masters, are not more remarkable in their way than the results produced in speakers of ordinary abilities by the use of fixed methods and orderly procedure. We

may be sure that the average of public speaking among people so trained was infinitely higher than that of our time.

For now a sort of suspicion or contempt hangs over the art of rhetoric, as artificial and affected. It is thought enough for a man to have clear ideas, and to learn to speak them forcibly, as best he can, by his own practice. All suspicion of rounded periods and studied emotion, of regulated pathos and factitious indignation, excites ridicule in any public speaking, but more than ridicule in so solemn an office as that of preaching.

Now all this feeling against what is called the rhetoric of the schools is quite sound and true, but wholly beside the point. The old Greeks would have said the very same thing, but would have added that it was a criticism, not of the use of rhetoric, but only of bad rhetoric. There are arts—such as architecture—where it is interesting, and therefore proper, to *show construction.*

In others, such as tailoring, it is part of the artist's duty to conceal it. In none is it expedient to show the refuse, the failures, the untidinesses of the work. The modern public is so unused to real rhetoric (as an art) that we set down the vulgarities and failures of rhetoricians as the natural outcome of their science. It must be owing to this strange misapprehension concerning rhetoric, that in our principal divinity schools among Protestants no care is taken to train men in the externals of eloquence, in the proper use of the voice and of the hands, still less in the proper method of constructing a persuasive discourse by an adherence to reasonable rules. There are college societies, which are practising grounds; but as no censor is there formally to criticise defects and correct them on the spot, such practice generally gives the student nothing but fluency, and even hardens him in all the faults which he may have possessed

at the outset or acquired. While theological learning, of which we shall speak presently, is fairly provided, hardly a thought is given to the expression of that learning, without which it is dead, and, as it were, buried in a tomb.

If the greatest speakers of the day were consulted, they would at once confess that their successes have been in proportion to their preparation, and that their apparently most sudden and inspired flights were the result of careful calculation. Are we then to despise this sort of persuasion in preaching? Are we to say that the smallest artifice in the pulpit is an offence against its dignity, and to be avoided as unworthy? Are we to insist that preachers now-a-days are, like the Apostles, to take no heed what they shall say, for that the Spirit will give them utterance? For this too is a reason why the study of rhetoric is discouraged among religious people. Here we again stand face to face with that

very noble but ideal view of the preacher as a man of intense piety, inspired to speak with more than mortal power and wisdom, and trusting implicitly to the Divine Spirit to give him words. Without for one moment denying the existence of such men at all ages of the Church, we may fairly say that to depend on such grounds in ordinary preaching is not only chimerical, but tends to prevent the preacher from adopting the lawful means of persuasion placed within his reach. He might as well start upon a voyage round the world and expect that the power of strange tongues would be given him to preach to the nations he found on his way.

If by the subtlest logic, by the most deliberate emotion, a man can force his own deepest convictions upon his hearers —I say *his own deepest* convictions, not mere official topics—then such artistic rhetoric is not only defensible, but strongly

to be encouraged. The true effects of eloquence are far more commonly attained by repressing than by forcing emotion, by avoiding than by displaying logic—in fact, by straining no chord of sympathy in the hearer. Thus real rhetoric will preserve us from exaggeration or falseness of any kind—a fault fatal to all sound conception of it. If our pulpits are to regain their power, men will have to study this art; they will have to realise that though random talking may at times be effective upon the platform, it will never be fruitful or impressive from the pulpit.

§ 24. We come now to the last of those personal defects which hinder the effectiveness of preaching. It is that want of learning which does not consist in general absence of culture, or in the general absence of rhetorical training, but in the want of that special theological training in which the layman expects the preacher to be his superior.

This want exists in all kinds of creeds and sects, and therefore embodies a capital fact. The teacher is supposed to know more than those whom he teaches, or else how can they look upon him with respect? Perhaps a qualified exception to this general statement may be made in the case of those extreme Protestants, who think the private judgment of any layman as good as the best professional opinion which can be had. But this theory, though held by so many respectable and pious people, is too unreasonable to be considered a serious limitation of our general statement. Still it has its effect, inasmuch as it affords some sort of pretext or excuse to young men in Protestant communities who offer themselves for the ministry without any special training. There is a sort of vague belief abroad that to feel strongly on the subject, and know one's Bible, is sufficient to warrant a man in assuming the office of a teacher of religion.

If we only think for a moment what it really means *to know one's Bible* it will explode this theory. To know the Bible in any reasonable sense, so as to be able to form any independent judgment about it, implies at least a good knowledge of Greek, in many cases a knowledge of Hebrew, and, besides, a careful study of the development of Christian opinion about the inspiration and authorship of the various books. These good people talk as if the whole volume had been penned at once and directly by the Holy Spirit, and not by a variety of men in divers ages, under various conditions, and doubtless with a varying share of inspiration. Probably, now-a-days, no one in his senses would assert that the Book of Esther and the Gospel of St. John did not differ in this last respect. Accordingly, the very people who lay the greatest stress on private judgment should learn that to attain this liberty they must undergo a

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long period of careful and critical study of their Bible as a collection of historical documents, often obscure, and sometimes apparently inconsistent. The ignorant lay preacher, who dares to offer an opinion on these difficult problems, is really the most abject slave of tradition; he is led blindly by no more critical guide than the headings of the chapters inserted by the Church whose authority he repudiates, or the opinion of his Sunday school teacher, which he learned when a child. He may assume, for example, as an axiom, on no better evidence, that the Song of Solomon is an allegory representing Christ and the Church. Nay, the very Bible, the very collection of books whose authority is set up against that of the Church, is a collection gathered and sifted by the Church, and only handed down to him under its care and authority. In no wise, therefore, can the preacher who does more than preach simple morals escape a de-

liberate and careful study of his Bible, except by a blind submission to the traditional creed of his Church.

And surely every effective preacher must do more than preach mere morals. The human race has hitherto been led, not by precept, but by dogma. It is not the ensample of a holy life, but the assertion of a separate creed, of new privileges resting on new beliefs, which has reformed the world once and again. If, therefore, in the present times of discussion, of historical criticism, of speculative interest in religion, a preacher avoids dogma, he is not likely to produce any permanent effect.

§ 25. All these considerations go to prove that theological training is absolutely necessary to raise the condition of the pulpit, and that it is not mere ornament, but an essential qualification. No illustration of this truth will be so convincing as the contemplation of those cases where the denial of it is confessed. There have been

of late years many cases of preaching being adopted, from serious conviction, by middle-aged men of other professions—soldiers, lawyers, engineers—who have left their calling to follow after Christ, as they conscientiously believe. These men wait for no training; they do not seek, and could not obtain from any sensible bishop, formal ordination; they are known as lay preachers, and attract audiences often from the very contrast of their previous calling or character to that which they have suddenly adopted. It is most remarkable that these men, however pious, however zealous, however popular among their co-religionists, however able in their former professions, have one and all, so far as I know, failed in making their mark as preachers beyond the narrowest bounds. Their fame is transient; their discourses, if published, find no general sale; they come and go without leaving any perceptible trace on public opinion, or

redeeming in any high degree the decaying reputation of their assumed profession. And yet if zeal without knowledge could work great effects, we might expect that some of them, at least, would be regarded as lights in the spiritual firmament of the age. There may be a few isolated cases where this is so, but to assert for them generally any great position such as that of the Hebrew lay preachers, the prophets,—if indeed these prophets were lay preachers,—would be simply unhistorical.

§ 26. This is not the place to discuss in detail what theological learning is requisite to avoid these mistakes, and to raise the preacher to the position which he ought to hold as an authoritative teacher of his faith. The general outline is plain enough. First of all, he must thoroughly understand the documents on which his faith is based, the historical credentials with which he is provided. What this implies has already

been indicated, and through such preparation alone will he avoid the pitiful exhibition, not unfrequent now-a-days, of hearing himself confuted out of the very documents of his creed, which he cannot read in their original language. In the next place, he must know the history of opinion in his Church concerning these documents —in fact, the history of dogma developed from them. For it requires no ordinary man, no single man's judgment, to gather up all the teaching of these many and various books into a system. The controversies of the early Christian Church show how difficult and gradual was the formation of such a body of Christian doctrine as could become a proper system. Lastly, we must add the history of the ritual he adopts, if he does not mean to repeat it as a parrot, but to understand the *why and wherefore* in the details of ceremonies.

I will not add a knowledge of controversy, lest we should go too far and

demand too much for the standard of any large profession. Yet the history of dogma cannot but consist mainly of controversies, though in our day these are of less importance than the broad principles of natural religion, which must be defended against sceptics on philosophical grounds. He that will approach this kind of controversy—and who can now avoid it?—must be skilled in metaphysics; he must have examined the conditions of knowing and being, as the philosophers say; he must meet subtleties with counter-subtleties, and show that even in the handling of such weapons he is no despicable adversary. This is the kind of man who, in the days of Louis XIV. and of Queen Anne, raised the Christian pulpit to a position of power and authority, not only among the poor and simple, but among the most cultivated and refined, and even the most worldly and critical thinkers of the day.

This long catalogue of personal defects

in the modern preacher will seem to most people sufficient in itself to account for the failure of the pulpit, at least as regards the higher classes; and they will perhaps think that no more need have been said. But these personal causes would be easy enough to combat were it not for the wider historical and social conditions lying behind them and making reform so difficult.

I will not, however, go over old ground again, but will endeavour, before speaking of possible remedies, to illustrate the effect of the faults now discussed on the actual preaching of the day. This is the more necessary as some readers may be impatient to know what is meant by the failure of the pulpit apart from the complaints made by thoughtless and irreligious people. And even supposing that the fact will be generally admitted, there may be critics who will say that matters are not worse than might be expected, that, after all, more good is done than people think, and so forth. I

do not deny the good it does, but am here concerned with what it ought to do.

V. Specimens of Defective Types.

§ 27. It is probably oftener due to defective training than to want of ability that men make habitual mistakes in their preaching. They fall into extremes and are guilty of exaggerations because they have not been carefully warned to maintain the *balance* of Christian doctrine; because they have not been warned against faults in rhetoric, against exaggeration of their favourite points, against an over demand on their hearers' sympathy; in fact, against all the faults which an inexperienced speaker is sure to make. But as most of our various ministers of religion are not trained in the manner as well as the matter of their discourses, it is rare to find a man who, by his natural genius, avoids these faults. For open criticism of

sermons is, by the nature of the case, excluded, and the preacher is the last to hear the censures with which the suppressed critics indemnify themselves at home.

The following are some of the most general types of exaggeration or defect which may be found in the average preaching of our day.

§ 28. I will take first what may be called the *Logical Extreme*, into which men fall who think that everything ought to be clearly proved, and that they cannot enforce a doctrine without a regular demonstration deducing it from higher principles.

Perhaps the most common case of this extreme is to be found in those many discourses which profess to explain the doctrine of the Atonement of Christ as a sort of bargain, or equivalent offered to God for the sins of mankind. The demands of the Creator are set down with painful precision, as if they were those of an exacting creditor; and we are told that the

magnitude of the payment must be exactly proportioned to that of the debt. No severer indictment can be brought, not only against the mercy but against the justice of the Deity, than this account of vicarious punishment; and it is very likely now-a-days, when people think freely on such questions, to shake them in their very belief of the Atonement.

Similar to this is the old argument, now only to be heard in remote country places, that the eternal punishment of sinners is to be explained by the fact that sin against an infinite Being is an act of infinite enormity, and therefore necessitates infinite punishment. The subterfuge that the condition of the damned is one in which they are perpetually guilty of new sin, and therefore subject to a constant renewal of their lease of punishment, is, if possible, more unreasonable. Both views, when adopted in their full enormity, base themselves on the theory that the Deity,

being an absolutely despotic Ruler, has a right to do what He pleases with His own Creation. To this theory we shall return in connection with another type of sermon.

The defect in all this kind of argument is that it pretends to discover laws and to lay them down with logical precision in matters where such precision is totally out of place or unattainable. The preacher may think the whole matter perfectly clear; he may assert boldly that there can be no mystery about it, that he can deduce it accurately from various texts of Scripture. Such clearness is surely the result of ignorance, of apprehending but a small part of a complex problem, of feeling a false confidence in one's own powers of discernment or spiritual endowment. There is no preaching more offensive to educated men than this, which puts forward with unblushing assurance all manner of assumptions and irrelevancies as cogent and irrefragable de-

monstrations. For theology is a science full of mystery; we are met almost at every step by the unknowable. If we attain in such a science to clear convictions it is not by the logical apparatus of elaborate syllogism.

§ 29. The opposite pole in preaching, from which the former is a reaction, or which it may produce by way of reaction, is the *Emotional Extreme*. As it was the great vice of the Schoolmen to attempt the teaching of theology in a logical system, so this extreme brings us back to the Mystics, who thought that true religion could not be acquired by way of cold argument, but was an affair of the heart, or rather of that beatific vision which far transcends the ordinary ways of sober thinking.

There is not wanting a great attraction in this school. The sense of holiness, like the sense of beauty, is something too pure and subtle for analysis; the revelations of a vision are infinitely grander and clearer

than the deductions of the understanding. There is, too, the feeling, the right feeling, that a science which deals with the unseen and the infinite cannot be an exact science, and cannot set down its conclusions as mathematically demonstrable. But the boundary between the persuasion of the intellect and the conviction of the heart is not easily defined; it is very hard to say where argument is to end and sentiment to assert itself. Hence a great many men, from vagueness of mind, from idleness, from sentimentality, adopt a style of preaching which consists in nothing but appeals to the heart, and demands upon a sympathy which they must soon exhaust.

§ 30. Some do it from vagueness of mind, not knowing what a proof means, and being, therefore, unable to construct or explain one where it is really possible. Let me add that wherever rational persuasion is attainable, this is the noblest and purest kind of eloquence—

indeed, that which alone deserves the name. The preacher who attempts deliberately to lead his hearers by appeals to their emotions, when he knows that it is possible to do it by their reason, is so far degrading his sacred office, and helping to degrade his hearers. But the case before us is not so bad; it is that of a man who knows no better than to make such appeals, and who accordingly ends by alienating the better class of his congregation.

Some do it from idleness, from the want of that honest vigour which seeks to grapple with the difficulties of the subject—that diligence which spends the midnight hours over grammars and commentaries, or works out independently solutions for the difficulties which occur to every earnest student in theology. It is, of course, far cheaper to idle during the week, and repeat worn-out sentiments from the pulpit on Sunday; but they sound hollow and

formal; they have not the ring of pure metal; and so the preacher becomes ultimately the worst kind of ritualist or formalist—the formalist in worn-out sentiment.

This is probably the largest division of over-sentimental preachers, and there is none more mischievous. It is these who have brought into fashion that gushing tone of voice and that affected solemnity of manner which are frequently assumed to be the index of piety, while they are really the index of shallowness and insincerity. Nothing reduces the effect of preaching in our day more than the fact that so many preachers adopt with their vestments a new voice and a new manner. They drawl out certain sacred names with mawkish emphasis; they constantly assume a sickly smile while they are expressing an artificial love of God, or of their erring brethren. The whole sermon becomes empty and official, and is understood to be the mere

performance of a stated duty. In fact, when we hear a preacher begin in a natural style, and with his proper voice,—when he speaks directly as a plain man to plain men,—when he seeks to argue with us as if he were arguing some matter of every-day life,—then it is that we at once gather up our attention, and set ourselves to hear him carefully. We feel that he means business; we conclude him to be in earnest; and so whatever he has to say produces its due effect. I do not know what the schools of *sacred rhetoric* teach, but of this we may be certainly convinced, that the first thing they ought to teach is an abhorrence for that vicious sentimentality of manner which is so uniformly adopted by certain schools of religious thought.

There are, thirdly, some men who adopt sentimental appeals from a peculiarity of constitution, to whom this side of things is very attractive, and who, therefore, naturally put it forward. In them it is not in-

deed a vice, but still a defect. They should be reminded that religion loses all its nerve and vigour if it be reduced to a mere matter of emotion, and to effusions about Divine love—effusions which often mislead them into strange metaphors and strange misinterpreting of very unsentimental facts.

Adam Smith argued with great force that all social propriety, nay, even all morals, depended upon not overstraining the sympathy of our fellow men. They were the touchstone by which we could test and repress the displays of vanity, or self-consciousness, or whatever other excesses our own self-love might urge us to commit. In no case is this more vital than in that of public speaking; in no relation of life does a man's success depend more frequently on the sympathy of his fellows. But in this peculiar branch of speaking, the trammels of another propriety have prevented any outspoken expressions of that sympathy; coldness and silence are not, as elsewhere,

plain evidences of its absence, and so the preacher may flatter himself that he is being heard with interest when he is merely tolerated from motives of public decency. He must therefore be more on his guard than any other speaker ; and instead of presuming on the respect with which he is treated, and abusing it, he should ever watch with care how far he can count on the real sympathy of his hearers, and ask why it is that it dies out so frequently. Few men have the presence of mind, the keenness of sight, the modesty, to watch for these symptoms, which are evanescent or subdued in our congregations. One cannot but wish that propriety did not extend so far, and most honest preachers would purchase, at the cost of some rude experiences, an increase of honest and outspoken criticism in congregations which are now oppressed and wearied with a formality which they hate, but which they have no power to abolish.

§ 31. If a digression were lawful, we might illustrate the same defect of over-sentimentality from the popular hymns of the day, which often revel in rhapsodies worthy of censure for their vulgarity, were they not made infinitely repulsive and mischievous owing to the holiness and mystery of the topics which they handle. There is also much of the same exaggeration in the religion taught to children, who are supposed to understand no argument, and are therefore only to be approached through their feelings. How often does this unsound assumption beget future scepticism or indifference! But these considerations, however interesting, must not lead us from our path.

§ 32. Let us turn to a new kind of defect, and one which at first sight will not be obvious—perhaps not even generally admitted to be a defect: I mean *Extreme Orthodoxy* in preaching. What, the reader will ask, is it possible for the preacher to be too

orthodox according to his lights? Surely he alone is entitled to teach any religion who believes thoroughly, and can expound and defend, every article of the creed which he professes. All this, generally understood, is perfectly true, and it is certain that dogmatism is a very important element in vigorous and clear preaching. Nevertheless, there is a sense, and a very important one, in which a preacher can be *too orthodox.*

It is rightly believed by most Christian communities that by the advent of Christ religion was finally fixed upon certain definite lines, contained in the Bible, and formulated by the Churches. This finality of our faith, the impossibility of any further change or development during the present dispensation,—these are articles of every faith which is Semitic in character, and they mark the whole history of religion throughout modern Europe. Thus, in a remarkable passage in the Mosaic

law, the people are warned that if a teacher arise who shall teach contrary to that law, *though he prove his mission by signs and wonders*, he is to be rejected and put to death (Deut. xiii. 1-5). This is the attitude of all our Christian communities,—indeed, of the Jews and Mohammedans also. The one thing about which people feel perfectly sure is, that their own religion is absolutely true, and can tolerate no modification. This is of course the very essence of faith; if we are not assured that we possess the whole truth, we are bound to seek it out at once, and adopt some other persuasion which will give it to us, if such can be found.

§ 33. And yet there *have* been great reforms in religion; even since the revelation of the Gospel, there have been great changes in faith. But they were all justified as returns to the original purity of the Bible, which had been corrupted by men. In no case have reformers ventured to preach their gospel as *new;* they have always

insisted upon its being a return to the old and therefore to the pure. Even those wild sects in America, which lay claim to a new revelation, and teach strange morals and stranger social laws, base themselves on ancient authority, and endeavour to find a warrant in the now abandoned standpoints of the Old Testament.

It is not necessary to inquire here how far this claim of all religious reformers to have merely returned to the primitive faith of their ancestors in its original purity can be historically maintained. It is likely enough that if a modern Protestant and a Christian of the second century met in the flesh, they would be astonished at the mutual divergence in their spiritual views, still more in their religious forms. It may, indeed, be fairly argued that an absolutely unmodified return to what existed centuries ago is perfectly impossible, and that any restoration must contain much that is new, in-

fused into it by the spirit of the age. But though we may distinguish in art the archaic from the archaistic, the really ancient from the elaborated antique; it is not expedient to do so in religion. Here, at least, it will be enough to show that even within the limits of strict orthodoxy, within that narrow liberty of opinion which the members of each sect accord to one another, there is such a thing as a development of doctrine, or, if that expression implies too much, let us call it a *drifting of public sentiment* in certain directions or away from certain aspects of religion. Here are some examples.

§ 34. There was no subject which obtained more painful prominence in the earlier preaching of the Church than the punishment of the wicked. Harrowing pictures were drawn of the eternal miseries of the damned, and art was summoned to aid by horrible illustrations the language of the pulpit. The main reason alleged

for insisting upon this doctrine was no doubt the duty of warning sinners from the wrath to come. It was considered that the terrors of hellfire would be a potent incentive to turn men from vice and heresy, and lead them to embrace orthodoxy and pursue virtue. This reason is still alleged by those who think it profitable to bring forward the subject, and it is, whether sound or not, the only defensible one. For the idea which is said to be prominent in Tertullian, that the eternal punishment of the lost, being contemplated by the saints in Heaven, will add to their happiness, is only a pandering to the passion of revenge. This may be thought excusable in days of great persecution, but now-a-days is simply disgusting. As a matter of fact, a preacher addressing a cultivated congregation, and under normal circumstances, did use the idea of Tertullian very lately in the diocese of Dublin. I happened to meet many of his congrega-

tion the same day, and they were all open-mouthed against him for so gross a violation, not only of good taste, but of Christian charity. In days of trouble and persecution, moreover of rudeness and violence in social life, we can conceive the harried Christians consoling themselves with the reflection that their tormentors had *their* good things in this life only, and that God's vengeance would requite them a thousandfold hereafter.

But let us set aside this extreme and truly un-Christian form of using the doctrine of eternal punishment. For we may go further, and say that in our own day even the orthodox have become undecided about it; many eminent and pious divines have expressed themselves against it; and we may take it for certain that in any educated congregation the majority regard it as a sort of obsolete appendix to their creed, which they lay aside and forget, but which they will not positively deny unless they are pressed.

Here, then, we come in view of what I mean by a preacher being guilty of an extreme in orthodoxy. Though public opinion in our churches has drifted away from this doctrine, some men will take it up, insist upon it as taught in their Bible and recognised by their creed; and so annoy and alienate their hearers by the perpetual enforcing of a dogma which many high and orthodox authorities have declared to be no essential of the Christian creed.[1] He will urge, no doubt, that he is convinced of the doctrine, and regards it as of great importance; that the deterrents from vice in this life are not strong enough; and that he were neglecting his duty if he did not constantly bring this awful consequence before his people. He will cite texts from the Bible in support of his views, and charge his critic with lukewarmness and

[1] The reader will remember, in case this passage is misrepresented hereafter, that I am speaking of *eternal* punishment, not of future punishment generally.

sentimentality in not adopting and proclaiming the whole truth. But in spite of all this, his sermons will have no effect, or a bad effect, because they are anachronistic, out of time and place, and preached to congregations who are estranged from that particular dogma in their Christianity.

§ 35. Akin to this error in preaching is the propounding of that Calvinistic side of religion which insists upon the small number of the elect, and the great number of those who will fall short of the kingdom of heaven. It may be logically accurate that the omniscient Deity foresees the whole future of each man, and that it is by His divine decree that the majority of mankind are allowed to remain in ignorance of the higher truth or in neglect of it. It may be theologically sound that few only will be saved, and that *broad is the way that leadeth to destruction;* but nevertheless, to remind the congregation constantly that by a divine and immutable law most of

them must be lost, and that the conditions of salvation require not great and earnest personal exertions, but special election by the Deity, is the most mischievous thing which a preacher can do. The day is gone by even for so great an orator as Massillon to terrify his congregation by a sermon *on the small number of the elect.* The doctrine of election may be felt a great privilege by many true Christians; it may be the only view reconcilable with certain aspects of Scripture; and yet to preach it with special insistence upon its corollary,—the multitude of the damned,—is an excess of orthodoxy which will discredit a modern preacher. We may indeed go further, and say that even attacks on this extreme Calvinism are now out of date, and that most people regard it as a waste of energy to combat a doctrine so little in sympathy with the temper of modern society and the belief of most Christians.

§ 36. All these special severities of doc-

trine seem to be derived from the same fountain-head, and the drifting of modern society away from them to be accounted for in like manner. This is so important and fundamental a matter in explaining the varieties of orthodoxy that we must discuss it with some detail.

The doctrines of the eternity and infinite severity of punishment reserved for those who fail by a hair's-breadth to attain the felicities of Heaven; the doctrine of the selection from all the inhabitants of the world by a perfectly arbitrary act of a small number for these felicities, and the exclusion of the rest—all such doctrines are necessarily based on the conception of the Deity as an absolutely despotic Ruler, whose powers and rights over his subjects have no limits. This is the purely Oriental conception of monarchy. The Oriental despot was thought to own his subjects like so many cattle; and to take away their property or their life, even

with torture, was no more a straining of his actual rights than it was to put to death, in the manner best suited to his convenience, the lower animals he had domesticated, though it involved great and unnecessary suffering. Indeed the despotic feeling as regards the lower animals is only now gradually giving way in the most enlightened parts of Europe; and humanity, though recognised in the law of England, is a notion quite foreign to the Irish peasant, to the Italian and Spanish peasant—indeed to the Governments of the latter countries—in fact, to most of the world. We need not cite the East, where humanity to men is not yet comprehended. So it is with the Eastern despot as regards his subjects. He can assign the severest punishments for the most trivial crimes, the greatest rewards for small or accidental merits. He rules with reference to himself, and any thought for the welfare of his people is accepted as a proof of

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generosity and condescension on his part, not as the performance of a duty.

Such being the case, we have only to add that in all speculations concerning the nature of the Deity men are obliged to use human analogies, and to represent as the king of kings, as the supremest of rulers, the great Being who is Lord over the world. It was perfectly impossible for early and Oriental writers to form any other conception of God than that of a Despot in the sense just explained. They acknowledged his great mercy and benevolence, but as a condescension on his part, not as a claim on the part of his subjects. Nay, he was a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation,—in this, above all, an Oriental monarch, for there it was customary to involve all the innocent family of an offender in his crime, and root out the whole household of him who dared to displease his King. He who ventures to

offend by not putting on a wedding garment is punished for this disrespect as being guilty of a hideous and unpardonable crime. The King exalts whom he will, and degrades whom he will. We are but as the clay in the potter's hand, from which he makes one vessel for honour and one for dishonour. And even St. Paul cannot see the possibility of questioning these absolutely despotic rights on the part of the King of kings. Whatever He chooses to do *for His own glory* is not only justifiable, but His natural course of action, and no man can possibly gainsay it.

§ 37. The very statement of these views —and citations to support them could be multiplied indefinitely — produce in the modern reader a certain painful impression, and why? Our notion of monarchy has changed; we no longer regard the absolute despot as the most splendid of types; we do not recognise that the earthly monarch's

proper object is his own glory, but rather the good and welfare of his people. *Our* highest conception is that of a constitutional king, who establishes wise and beneficent laws, and binds himself to act in conformity with them, even though he have the power to reverse or violate them.

There are not wanting expressions of this side of God's character, even in the Semitic Scriptures. But according as modern civilisation has more and more determined it to be the highest ideal of a king, so this aspect of the Deity has become the prevailing one in modern theology of the higher kind; and this, the moral view of the government of the world, has superseded the despotic view of older days. The fact that diseases engendered by vice are hereditary may be identified with the proclamation that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation; but the ground and reason of both are widely different. The

former is the assertion of a great natural law, that the consequences of vice are beyond our control, and lead to disastrous results affecting those whom we should be the last to injure. It teaches us to compute the loss and damage inflicted upon the human race by the wickedness of a few. The latter is distinctly asserted to be the consequence of the jealousy of the Deity, who wreaks His vengeance upon all the household of him who commits high treason in allowing any other being to usurp the place of his one and only Sovereign.

Thus there is a contrast,—I will not say a conflict,—between the despotic and constitutional aspects of the Deity in modern theology. On the one hand we have the analogies and arguments suggested by the sacred authors, who lived under despotic governments; on the other the modern or constitutional view of God's government. To insist upon the former is an excess of

orthodoxy, and gives rise to the prominence of the doctrines and imply the severity and exclusiveness of Christianity.

We must allow that the actual omnipotence of the Deity, and still more the fact that he is the Creator of man, and not his Ruler only, afford the Absolutist in theology a strong ground for denying the analogy between modern kings and the great King of kings. It may be argued with perfect consistency that His rights and powers over man are absolute, and are justly represented as such by sacred writers. But this logical side of the matter will not outweigh the feeling in the minds of modern congregations, that despotism is not the highest form of government, and therefore the modern preacher will do well to study with care that constitutional side of God's government which corresponds to the temper of our society.

§ 38. It was necessary to enter with more than usual detail into what I ventured to

call the orthodox extreme, because the expression was liable to be misconstrued, and the underlying facts misconceived. And yet to those who will not admit any development, or even any drifting, in orthodox religions, all that has been said is vain. I will cordially admit that a stern dogmatic preacher, who refuses to vary with any wind of doctrine, and sets forth the truth as it was conceived and expressed by the great divines centuries ago, affects serious hearers with a feeling of great respect for his consistency and singleness of heart. But we must feel that he is reproducing these ideas from himself, and not copying them slavishly from the forgotten tomes of a theological library. This latter kind of preaching, common enough even among those who ought to know better, is simply contemptible; and the anachronisms exhibited are not those psychological anachronisms which we have just spoken of as interesting, but those unconscious

anachronisms which only excite amusement or pity.

§ 39. But the real dignity of dogmatic preaching is more strongly exhibited by its contrast with what may be called the broad or *Heterodox Extreme*, a form of preaching very common, and even fashionable, at present, and one which perhaps more than any other brings preaching into disrepute. It is not here intended to discuss the cases in which men set forth from their pulpits doctrines clearly at variance with the creed which they have professed, and present the painful spectacle of inconsistency and self-contradiction in a teacher, who ought to be of all things clear and consistent. Even to be suspected of holding views inconsistent with his profession, spreads doubt and distrust among his hearers; and hence there is no weapon to which malicious people of ostentatious orthodoxy more frequently resort than this disseminating of sus-

picions, when they dislike rivals, or fear theological antagonists.

But I am not here concerned with cases of distinct heresy, or with those men who think that their position permits them this license. What is here meant by the heterodox extreme, as opposed to the excessive orthodoxy just discussed, is rather a general laxity as regards the importance of dogma, and a sort of easy-going implication that we must leave men great liberty as to their beliefs, provided they are strict in their duties and their life. This error, like all those which affect preaching, consists in the distortion of a valuable truth. Liberty of opinion, and the right of private judgment as to doctrine, is the stronghold of modern enlightenment; it has been the common error of all Churches, —and not least of the ultra-Protestant Churches,—to shackle it unduly. Thus Descartes, a great scientific discoverer, found in the reformed theologians of

Holland far bitterer enemies than in the Roman Church.

But if, through recoil from this error, modern preachers come to believe that dogma is of little importance, provided a higher morality be enforced, they make, in my opinion, a very grave mistake. For I take it to be historically certain that the world has been reformed, not by preaching morals, but by preaching dogma. The most perfect example only reaches those immediately around it; a recital of its perfections has no power to stir those afar off in age or country. Thus the early teachers of Christianity seldom insisted on the details of Christ's life. Indeed, if all the personal allusions in the Epistles were gathered together, we should fail utterly to obtain from them a picture of the *man*. What converted the world was not the example of Christ's life; it was the dogma of His death. It was the assertion of His divinity and His atonement which formed

the real substance of early Christian preaching, and it was this which reformed the world.

§ 40. It would be easy, but would require large space, to show the same feature in the other religions founded by a great personality. It was always the founder's divine mission, and the dogma revealed to him, which remained the lifeblood of the new religion. Hence the very usual idea among fashionable preachers, that they need not insist upon dogma, that they may admit great differences on speculative points, that they need only teach purer morals and higher practical aims in our life,—all this is based on a very natural error, but an error which history has long since exposed. This is the weakness of such books as *Ecce Homo*, in themselves beautiful and true, but not able to produce any permanent impression on society.

It is not here asserted that moral preaching is of no use. Far from it. But this is

asserted, that moral preaching by itself will have but little effect; it must be used as an accessory to dogmatic preaching, for it is dogma which rules the great changes in the religious thought of the world. Hence appears the error of what I have called the heterodox extreme, which plays with foreign doctrines as interesting variations of opinion, which will not controvert any article in a speculative creed, and which professes to care for none of these things, provided a pure life be preached.

It has been remarked that all great social and political revolutions have been preceded and introduced by intellectual movements. It was Voltaire and Rousseau and the Encyclopædists who awakened the French mind to the ideas of the Revolution. So it was the Gospel of St. John and the Epistles of St. Paul on which the main body of Christian dogma is founded, and these are the speculative parts of the New Testament. To evade dogma, then, or to hold it

of little account, is a defect in the preacher, who is never, or hardly ever, successful, except he be dogmatic. The moral essayist in the pulpit is common enough now-a-days; he is often a literary artist, and attracts many people by his grace of diction and richness of ideas. He never shocks or frightens them, for his real gospel is that of modern culture. So it was with Menander and the genteel comedy of the Greeks, when the stage had given up all idea of reforming mankind, and confined itself to pictures of human life. There are great lessons to be gained by such portraiture, and by the graceful but forcible exposure of the weakness and folly of men. But this is not preaching, and will not preserve for the preacher the great vantage ground he once possessed as the leader of earnest men.

§ 41. The two excesses now discussed may perhaps be classed, with others which have not been mentioned, under another pair of defects, which affect the general

character of a preacher, irrespective of the particular doctrines he propounds. The first and commonest of these is the *Extreme of Sameness* which characterises our sermons, and which tends to make people think that they will only hear what they knew long before, and what is therefore hardly worth hearing over again.

And yet this feeling on the part of the hearer is met on the part of the preacher by the distinct principle, that the great cardinal doctrines of his faith not only require constant restatement, but that this restatement is a necessary part of his duty. There is even a school of pious men who think that all Christianity centres round one cardinal doctrine—Justification by Faith in Christ's Atonement; and I have often heard them say that they should feel unable to give an account of their stewardship if a stranger had chanced to attend for once their ministry, and, being ignorant of the truth, had not heard it

from their lips. These excellent and pious men put such stress on this consideration, and were so convinced that their preaching might be, and often was, the occasion for sudden conversion from darkness to light, that nothing would induce them to vary, beyond the text and some illustrations, the character of their preaching.

It always appeared to me that they curiously ignored the lessons taught by their ritual, the reading of the Scriptures at every service, and still more the fact that practically every hearer, though not understanding the Gospel after their fashion, is baptized and brought up in the faith. Still, exceptions, though rare, were possible, and so far their position was logically defensible. More serious was the fact that the great majority heard the same thing so often,—that, for the sake of the accidental stranger or careless hearer who might be struck with the new light, the rest were left in intellectual as well as spiritual poverty.

They were taught no higher lessons; they were fed with milk and not with meat; and those among them who felt the desire of going on towards perfection, were often starved by such preaching.

Although, therefore, the sameness in this kind of preaching was the result of principle, and arose from notions of duty, it tended in general to bring preaching into disrepute. And indeed the cases I have cited were only the highest and best cases. How many followers of these men have kept repeating the same thing merely from laziness, from ignorance, from poverty of thought, consoling themselves all the while that they were doing their duty thoroughly! How many of them put off their preparation till the night before, and then ran together a string of pious platitudes to satisfy the requirements of their office!

§ 42. This error of sameness is by no means confined to the particular school here cited to illustrate it. In all faiths and

creeds it is to be found ; we are even told that the Positivists always preach on the same text. There are also many men with a favourite doctrine who think that no one knows its importance but themselves, and so keep reiterating it to their weary hearers, who deliberately compose themselves to inattention as soon as they hear the subject introduced.

A considerable amount of sameness is unavoidable in a preacher on a definite form of faith, shackled by all manner of social trammels, and obliged to preach far oftener than is consistent with long and thoughtful preparation. But if a certain variety be not attained,—if people know beforehand exactly what they will hear,—then the sermon, however true and good, becomes like some well-known melody—well-known because of its beauty and associations, but nevertheless at last palling on the sense, and heard with impatience and disappointment. If it be true that

there are many people who never tire of such a melody, so there are also many who never tire of hearing the same arguments. But these are not the people benefited by preaching, nor is it they, happily, who lead public opinion.

While, therefore, I feel very strongly that the sameness of modern preaching is often due to the most serious convictions, and is defended by the most pious and earnest men, it cannot but be regarded as an active cause in the decay of pulpit influence. The modern public are used to much more intellectual variety than their forefathers. They find intellectual recreation in various literature, in open debate, in the many and often thrilling subjects expounded from public platforms. It is, no doubt, an unfair expectation that the pulpit shall keep pace with this change, but the total neglect of it is certainly not a practical way of dealing with the difficulty.

§ 43. But there is one way of dealing with

it which cannot but be regarded as an error in the opposite direction. It is the desire in some men to make variety their first object,—to go out of the way and seek anywhere and everywhere the materials for a new and startling discourse. To this feeling, the *Excessive love of Variety*, may be ascribed the vulgar habit of introducing anecdotes in the pulpit,—anecdotes which are not only foolish and beside the point, but often practically untrue, inasmuch as the preacher always explains the facts, and the explanation may be palpably invented. Anecdotage in the pulpit gratifies only the most ignorant and vulgar of hearers, and from vulgar I mean to exclude all those, of however low degree, who come to hear seriously for the sake of spiritual benefit. The use of such illustrations is therefore very dangerous, and not to be resorted to without the greatest caution, especially in the assignment of motives or causes for the facts.

Of a similar character are those excursions into politics, into popular science, into secular poetry, which sometimes occupy whole discourses, and which are listened to with attention and amusement, but seldom with profit. If these things be used in illustration of great truths, they are evidences of large culture in the preacher, and also have their real value. But to make variety the main object of preaching is to forget that eternal truths require more than a passing notice. The broad lines upon which human conduct should be built must be often and often explained and enforced. In the words of a great heathen moralist—*Conviction does not easily arise in a man unless he shall every day hear the same things, speak the same things, and at the same time apply them to life.*[1] It was said of a well-known Roman Catholic prelate, who in late years exercised enormous influence over Ireland,

[1] *Encheir. of Epictetus*, ed. Rolleston, p. 57.

that if you asked him any question a second time, even at an interval of years, he would give the same answer in the same words. And that was the secret of his power. Strong and clear persistence in the same great truths is not an element of weakness, but of power in a speaker. But he must take care to confine his insistence to points of real importance; in lesser matters it is, as we have shown, tedious and ineffective.

It may be considered the test of seriousness in an audience, and an index whether they come for improvement or for amusement, to inquire whether they insist on and appreciate variety beyond everything in their preacher. If they do, we may be sure that it is not their spiritual welfare which guides them, but the mere desire of spending an hour pleasantly, or less unpleasantly than usual, in their church on Sundays. And so those preachers in our large cities who affect this sort

of variety are sure to command a considerable attention from the idle classes — I mean spiritual idlers — who now abound everywhere. It is a mistake to consider the preaching which attracts a crowd of this kind successful preaching. It does not even raise the preacher in the proper and sound estimation of those people whose opinion is but worth having; it is very likely to mislead him into the belief that he is doing good, when he is doing at best nothing at all. For in most cases he is doing worse than nothing; he is training his people to the sensation-sermon, an analogous thing to the sensation-novel, and one which produces the same kind of effect upon those who pursue it continuously.

VI. Concerning Remedies.

§ 44. It cannot but be suggested to many readers by all this balancing of extremes

that the art of preaching is, like Aristotle's ethical perfection, a sort of mean between faults in both directions, and that the whole matter might have been summed up in one sentence: to avoid excess and defect, and hold the middle course. And yet, though perhaps logically strong, such a position would practically be as weak as possible, and contain the most fatal advice. The man who goes through life in any capacity, avoiding excess, keeping clear of mistakes, correcting in himself and others all extravagance,—this man may pass through life as a respectable member of society, but he will never kindle enthusiasm; he will never have a following; he will seldom even command respect from any but the poorest intellects. He may obtain the praise of some for thorough good sense, as the phrase is, and for having no enemies, and for that common wisdom which merely consists in advising caution—a cheap wisdom too often

current: he will never be a great or a striking man. This, which is true generally, is especially true of preachers. The man who avoids unpleasant doctrines, and avoids all bold statements of his own opinion, who keeps within the narrowest bounds set him by the theological public, and takes no lead in the march of opinion, will never be a good, far less a great, teacher. These are what we call the *safe men* in the Church. They may appear safe at the moment; in the long run they contribute to the ruin of the Church they represent. For they are essentially cold, and they repress in their surroundings all the glow and fervour of enthusiasm. I repeat it again on account of its importance—the so-called safe men in a Church are among the surest causes of its decay.

Thus, then, we seem to have arrived at this curious position, that while the great and mischievous hindrances to effective preaching consist in the adopting of ex-

tremes—excess in doctrine or its absence, in logic or its absence, in uniformity or its absence—we find on the other hand that the avoidance of extremes tones down everything into a sombre mediocrity, which is perhaps more mischievous than they are. Success in preaching would seem therefore impossible, and all our labour in vain. It remains for us to see how far this dilemma is absolute, and how far the review of the whole question enables us to suggest remedies, and predict their chances of success.

§ 45. If a man of large sympathies and wide experience were asked which among his worldly friends he considered to have lived the happiest life, he would certainly not choose those who had timorously and circumspectly avoided every extreme. In human life there are many great delights in themselves an excess, and very frequently leading to loss and damage of some kind. And

yet the damage can be made good and the loss recovered; and then the man has added to his experience that which will make him know human life in some truer and deeper way than that of mere speculation. He who has lived, in many senses of the term, intensely, even passionately, is often a more interesting man from many aspects than he who has merely kept clear of dangers. He is interesting because he possesses a stronger, bolder nature, which is guided, sometimes, at least, by great and noble impulses; he is interesting because he knows what suffering is as well as joy; in fact, he may be forgiven much, because he has loved much. In any case he knows the great interests and great temptations of the world really, and not by hearsay, and can estimate the amount of good and evil in human nature which the theoretical observer only guesses from the outside.

This is not sanctioning that men shall

be passionate in order to excuse vice; far from it. But it is really a distinct counter-statement to the old theory that happiness consists in the avoidance of extremes; it asserts that to have fallen into the extremes, and to have escaped the tempest, not without some pain and loss, may possibly be happier, if we morally survive it, than to live, like the gods of Epicurus, in the *intermundia* between felicity and sorrow, and never to ruffle the eternal calm of a placid existence.

But this is not the place to criticise such an argument, for it is only here introduced to serve as an illustration of what really great and full sermons should be, as contrasted with the discourses of the *safe man*. All the extremes which have been discussed are censured rather because they absorb a man's preaching, than because they are in themselves faulty. In the largest sense it is sameness which ruins, and variety which quickens, all public

speaking. The preacher should not avoid strong and even harsh statement of doctrine; he should not be afraid in any one discourse of any of the faults above noted; he should fear them as spread over the whole of his preaching. St. Paul on one side, and St. James on the other, afford an infinitely stronger and better statement of the full Christian creed than a balanced declaration made by qualifying the one with the other, and adding limitations and reservations to each proposition.

§ 46. What is therefore required of the preacher is to feel that his subject is broad and has many sides, and that each deserves to be put forward strongly and clearly—it is even better to do it inconsistently as regards the various sides—but each in its turn. To do this efficiently, the best thing we can suggest is higher and more careful culture in the teacher. Piety—a great and effective, though not all-sufficing condition—can, unfortunately, not be secured in any

large class. We may even predict that it will remain always the privilege of the few. Intellect, in the higher sense, is not to be secured, for the same reason. Like the wise man of the Stoics, who differed in kind from the rest of the world, a few men have real brains or intellectual power; and until the conditions of producing the human race change more than is likely within the present age, these cases of mental power will remain the exceptions.[1] But as the pious man naturally gravitates towards a profession which gives full scope to the aspirations of his heart, so the intellectual man as such will turn to the course of life which not only gives him scope for speculation, but scope for *power* and influence. Hence he will naturally adopt such professions as enable a man to attain great position, as the natural consequence of success. It is therefore by the great prizes at the head of a profession that really able men

[1] Cf. on this my *Old Greek Education*, § 65.

are attracted. They are not dispirited by the slowness or lateness of the reward. They are even content to toil for nothing, provided that when their power is felt there will be high place and influence to reward it.

This, then, is a point of view which modern society should not forget, when reflecting on the possibility of reforming and improving our preachers. There were in older days, and there are even still in established churches, these great prizes, and consequently very able men will accept poverty in their youth in order to attain them. But when we hear it stated as a good feature in the present Protestant Church of Ireland that any curate can command twice the salary he could formerly obtain, we should ask, What about the bishops and deans? what about the best livings? And when we hear that a young man is likely to get as much salary in five years as he will ever get,—when we

see in the Irish the difficulty and dislike of giving their new bishops more than a respectable pittance, we may safely conclude that though the better pay of curates will secure for such a ministry the entrance of a great many poor men who want a quick return for the outlay of their education, the lack of real prizes will deter all such as are able and ambitious to succeed, unless they at the same time feel a deep and controlling call to devote themselves to the teaching of religion.

No doubt the majority of pious people in the Irish Church would accept this conclusion as the right one. They would say, What do we want with clever men in our ministry, if they are not seriously called to it from within? Intellect without piety is surely dangerous, and will lead the Church into trouble. Let us have safe, pious men, and scorn the aid of human intellect! The heathen by wisdom know not God, and so forth. All we need here add is, that if

stupid men on the average are more pious than able men, there is something wrong about the creed which is not in harmony with power and force in human character.

But without going again into this question, it is enough to repeat that here, in this argument, the question of preaching alone is before us. It is certainly true that if we are to have able and vigorous preaching, we must have clever men. It may be worth while to despise human ability for the sake of higher ends ; it may be worth while to keep out ambition and energy for the sake of the dangers they provoke. But though your safe men, your men of small ambition and poor abilities, may make valuable ministers in other respects, they will not, however pious, make preachers. Perhaps preaching is altogether a mistake now-a-days. If so, let it be abandoned ; but as long as we have it, and as long as we desire to have it good and telling, we cannot despise intellect in

any ministry, but must try to secure it by all reasonable means.

§ 47. Next comes the question of culture. This is the point where good can really be done by care and forethought. Hence it is that bishops and colleges and synods should insist that all possible efforts be directed to make the teachers in their Churches superior in culture to the average of their congregations. Hence it is that they should insist on University training, or whatever other training in science and literature will lift men out of the herd, and fit them to speak as educated men on the great topics which they profess to expound.

For the same reason those theological colleges in favour with the Roman Church and the extremest Protestants alike are radically defective. They either give no general culture at all, or give it with a bias and flavour of theology, which it retains all through a man's teaching, and which

shows evidently the source from which it has sprung. Those ancient seats of learning, where theological students both live with, and are taught along with, lay students, are therefore much preferable; and as a matter of fact it would be hard to find a really eminent preacher coming from a close theological college, at least in the Protestant Churches. Contact with the world, familiarity with lay science and lay professions, union among all civilised men in feeling and temper, — these influences give a more human and sympathetic tone to the young preacher, and are likely to teach him what kind of arguments are suitable for convincing men.

§ 48. But while the universities are pre-eminently the best training places in the way of *general* education, they are much to be blamed for not having given more attention to the special training of theological students in their schools. It is all

very well to say that they are only concerned with general preparation, and that the student must learn the special matters himself. If they adopt a theological course at all, they are not to be excused for neglecting all practice in rhetoric, and in the composition of sermons. Writing an occasional exercise, which the professor reads, or perhaps corrects, is little to the point; but I should be very sorry, on the other hand, to see classes established in *Sacred Rhetoric*,—as the manner of some is,—as if sacred rhetoric were different from any other rhetoric. The sort of training here meant is this, that the Professor should not only announce a subject and require written exercises on it, but himself correct them, and show how the subject ought to have been treated, giving specimens of his own wherewith the students may compare their less perfect essays. He should also point out to them those simpler arts in composition which many

of us only learn by continual failures, and which many fail to appreciate all their lives. This suggestion and criticism of the lines of treatment which as ubject admits, is a vital part of the training of a preacher which has hitherto been strangely neglected. So much for the composition of written sermons.

But every preacher who addresses large and ignorant congregations should also be trained in *extempore* speaking, which alone affects the masses. If they lose the speaker's eye, they will hardly follow the thread of his discourse. And they want homely, vernacular English, such as a man of culture may recoil from writing down in his study. Training in rhetoric, properly so called, is therefore necessary; and all theological students should be carefully taught and watched as to their language, action, and delivery, so that when they come to occupy a pulpit they will not at once offend the hearer by

awkwardness or mannerism, but attract him by unaffected simplicity. It was the study of these principles which made orators of the Greeks and Romans, whose works are models to the present day. They did not venture to come before any audience whom they wished to persuade, without the anxious use of every possible aid. Do we imagine that we can expect successful preaching from a body of average men who do not even know what the science of rhetoric means? Training in rhetoric is therefore a very pressing need of our preachers, and will do more to improve them than can well be estimated.

§ 49. Let us here repeat the objection which many serious readers have been impatiently reconsidering while reading this page. What do we want, they say, in the pulpit with artificial rhetoric? What do we want with affectations and mannerisms? We want men to speak simply from the heart plain and striking truths.

We want to feel the good man, and not the polished orator, addressing us. In all this I perfectly concur. But let me repeat to these objectors that they are wholly in error when they assume that speakers are natural if they neglect rhetoric, artificial if they employ it. For we are not speaking of bad and vulgar rhetoric; we are not speaking of the vulgar teaching of elocution by some self-styled Professor, like those of music and dancing. Bad rhetoric will produce many evils; it is the duty of good rhetoric to obviate the very faults of own abuse.

There is no greater fault in a speaker than to produce the impression that he is studied and artificial; there is nothing which a good teacher should correct more severely. And it is not the voice of nature, but the voice of the most consummate art, which speaks simply from the heart clear and striking thoughts. To attain this perfection is the highest

ideal at which rhetoric can aim. It is a profound mistake to expect it from untutored nature. There may be one man or perhaps two in a generation who have this highest of all arts by a divine gift of genius. Among ordinary men nothing is so natural and inevitable, when they attempt public speaking, as mannerism. It infects them immediately, constantly, pertinaciously; while we require the most unwearied care and diligence to root it out. We may regard it as an axiom that the more ignorant and uncultivated a speaker, the less natural will he be; he will use absurd and fallacious arguments; he will indulge in tawdry and extravagant metaphors; he will display awkward and offensive action. If he be gifted, as the Irish are, with natural fluency, it will probably only intensify these faults. In the preacher especially, who is secure from open ridicule on the part of his audience or succeeding

speakers, they are apt to grow up unchecked, and to mar his power.

Thus it is certain that the adoption of a religious voice in the pulpit, a voice distinct from the ordinary tone, and intended to convey an impression of greater solemnity, is one of the chief causes of the preacher being regarded as artificial, and his subject foreign to our ordinary business and our serious worldly interests. No one can tell how much this simple and common blunder has done to sever our religion from our ordinary life, and relegate it to special moments, so as to be assumed with Sunday clothes and services. It should, therefore, be the first duty of a sound rhetorician to extirpate this fatal mannerism in the preacher, and insist that real seriousness is quite inconsistent with any such airs and graces.

So much, then, may be urged concerning the better training, both general and

special, which the clergy of all denominations, of all sorts and classes of men, ought to receive, and without which their preaching will only be effective in those rare cases where nature has done everything in a way which art can only faintly copy.

§ 50. Turning to other considerations, it must be confessed that for a preacher, who should soar above the practice of ordinary life, and proclaim ideal piety, ideal virtue, ideal self-sacrifice, the Roman Catholic law of celibacy is very profitable. The orator who emerges from his study or his cell, unknown or scarcely known to his audience, can reason of justice, and temperance, and judgment to come, with far more singleness of heart and far more force than he who is engaged in the trivialities and distractions of family life, and lives in a society more or less inquisitive and censorious. If, therefore, celibacy could be maintained for an order of preachers in the Reformed Churches,

it would tend in many ways to make their discourses more impressive, more downright, more ideal in aim. It is Elijah from the desert, it is John the Baptist from the wilderness, it is Savonarola from his cell, who are best qualified to impress and lead mankind by preaching.

§ 51. But if in many sects or churches this be found difficult or impossible to attain, it could be in some measure made good by establishing an Order of itinerant preachers, whose whole duty should be to travel from place to place for the purpose of speaking from the pulpit. Of course such an order, which need never be large, should consist of men specially selected for their preaching talent, and the fact that they seldom addressed the same congregation would make it unnecessary for them to prepare more than a limited number of discourses, on which they could spend all their care and attention. These discourses would even gain in terseness and

completeness by frequent recasting; and thus we might expect to obtain the best work which the best preachers could produce, instead of remaining at the mercy of some half-educated curate, with neither talent for speaking nor time for preparation.

Above all, our preachers would not be subject to that most damaging, but most illogical criticism: *Does he live up to what he preaches?* Damaging this criticism is, as everybody knows. It is also illogical, because, *as a preacher*, it is his duty to say the best and finest things; it is his duty rather as a man than as a preacher to endeavour to live up to them. What should we say if the preacher were to lower his standard to suit his own life? What should we say if he only recommended a limited purity, a qualified faith, a doubtful hope, because he felt he could rise no higher himself? Of course such a thing would be absurd. He is

bound in the pulpit to take the highest possible ground. Hence it is obvious that his foibles, which are inevitable, should be kept out of sight of his hearers.

§ 52. It is a natural corollary from this principle to suggest the abolition of constant sermons. To expect from any one two good sermons every week, or even one, is unreasonable; how much more to expect them from a hard-working parish priest,—from a man whose practical duties and whose family cares must occupy most of his time. The sooner this necessity is recognised among Protestants of all kinds the better. The days are now passing away when the sermon can be considered the main service, with a mere preface of prayers and Scriptures. There is no magic in the sermon, nor in this constant preaching; and the practice of setting young men, on their first ordination, to produce sermons at such a rate is generally fatal to their success. In a year or two

they get into the habit of winding up as much theological commonplace as will keep going for twenty-five minutes; all attempt at elaborating or sifting a subject is impossible; and so we have created for ourselves that class of average preachers whom we hear, and do not hear; whom we attend, and do not attend to. This duty of having one or two sermons ready every Sunday, under all circumstances of mind and temper, of business or recreation, of indisposition or depression, is the most intolerable tyranny conceivable, until the victim of it learns to do it in a slovenly and inefficient way, so that it comes to weigh lightly upon his conscience and his time. Constant preaching, therefore, should be abolished, or handed over to the itinerant order, whose visits would relieve the stationary priest of some of the duty.

§ 53. To help in another way, it would seem very expedient that instead of the old-

fashioned homilies ordered to be read in some Churches, a new and large collection of authorised sermons should be issued by the heads of each Church, selected from her greatest doctors, and given to every parish minister to use freely when he is unable to produce anything useful of his own. Such a collection, made in a large spirit, and from the greatest preachers, would save many a congregation from the waste of time and temper caused by a foolish discourse, and would accustom the minister to acknowledge his obligations openly, and not appropriate the words of others in silence. Indeed, it is very likely that the habit of indiscriminate plagiarism which is now permitted, and which must be permitted, to our overtaxed preachers, leads to a laxity in their notions of honesty in other respects, and lays them open to the charge of holding a lower standard in this all-important side of morals than their secular neighbours.

The homilies attempted to meet the difficulty in their day. How infinitely better it could be met by culling from our splendid pulpit literature!

§ 54. On the other hand, on those occasions when a great preacher is to address the people, and when the sermon really is the main thing, all our Churches should show more elasticity in shortening or dispensing with their services, and not wearying the audience before the orator obtains their attention. A service of an hour is a very bad introduction to the mental strain of following a sustained argument; many people are so impatient of long prayers that they will not even go to hear the sermon. Nor can it be urged now-a-days, when most people can read for themselves, that constant and long services are in any way so essential or useful as they were when the people could obtain no other spiritual sustenance. Thus the sermon by itself would often be attractive, and would not

only enlist the interest of the audience, but that of the preacher himself, who would feel listlessness and laziness on his part to be indeed criminal when they stand out by themselves, and cannot escape under cover of the listlessness of the audience.

Possibly it might be well to vary even more the external circumstances of preaching. It might be well to have sermons not in pulpits, but on platforms, or from the chancel, or in some other way less bound by fixed ceremony. In all these changes caution should be used, and in no way should the seriousness of the office be impaired; but let the seriousness be real, not fictitious; let it be in the spirit, not in the letter.

EPILOGUE.

§ 55. It may be asked at the conclusion of this study what the writer really hopes or anticipates for the future of preaching, and

whether he has no larger and more thorough-going reforms to suggest. A few words on each of these points will fitly bring these remarks to a close. As regards the future of preaching, I confess that among the better classes, and with educated congregations, I think its day is gone by. They no longer want instruction from the pulpit when they can find it in thousands of books ; nor will they be led by the opinions of men who are not superior to themselves in intellect and culture, often not even in training. They will no doubt continue to attend sermons for years to come, by way of occupation on an idle day,—it may be from some intellectual interest in special preachers, or as an example to young people. But the days for any average minister to lead and influence such people *by his preaching* are gone by. He may do it by visiting, by special argument with each, by the example of his life. He will no longer do it by a set discourse,

when people can read many better discourses, and have grown callous to those sudden impressions which stimulate the ignorant masses.

With these, on the other hand, the power of the pulpit ought still to be great; and seeing that the majority of congregations, even in the most civilised parts of the world, is still ignorant and unlettered, there is a great scope here for powerful preaching. The masses are still to be reached, so far as good influences go, only through the platform and the pulpit. Through the press, alas! they frequently obtain little more than the worst and vilest instruction. It is here, in the mission for what is noble and true and spiritual to the masses, that the failure of modern preaching is deeply blamable, and it is to this point that reforming churches should direct their efforts.

§ 56. Are there, then, no larger reforms or improvements to be suggested than

those to be found in this essay? No doubt there are; its main object is to exhibit the decay, not to attempt the reform, of modern preaching. Other minds approaching the problem from this latter side will throw light upon it, and the very criticism of the faults of this essay may suggest new and fruitful views. But I will here insist that the reform suggested of training specially the men set apart for preaching is not a trifling one, and is likely, if adopted, to have far larger effects than may at first be imagined. The preaching of modern days, so far as we know it, is purely an amateur performance, taken up without special talents or special training, by those who offer themselves for the office in the various Churches. No doubt the Church of Rome, with her usual wisdom, has established preaching orders, where some selection is made according to talent, and some training given, though I know not what it is, and whether it is

really efficient. But with this limited exception, there is nothing whatever done to improve preaching by human means. Some people, too, think there ought not to be; that men need take no thought what they shall say. With these people I am not agreed, as the whole of this essay considers the matter from a human point of view.

But from this point it cannot be urged too strongly that random and amateur attempts are likely beforehand to be of little value; and were any impartial judge from another world shown what the training of our ministers is, and what they were expected to accomplish, he would wonder at such expectations, and argue with certainty that, as in all other things human, special care and training are needful to attain perfection, so preaching also can be of no use or influence, so long as there is no reasonable care taken to ensure a better result.

It may perhaps be argued that when good effects are only anticipated among ignorant people of the lower classes, such a limitation cuts away the ground from the advocates of higher training in the clergy. It may be said, Of what use is special training to these people, who do not know the difference between good and bad rhetoric, who can only understand the plainest and simplest language? I will conclude by once more exposing this serious blunder. Ignorant people may not be able to *explain* the difference between good and bad rhetoric; they *feel* it more keenly than their betters; they are more easily and violently affected by a real orator; they are as easily disgusted by incompetence. Nowhere are the arts of eloquence so necessary and so telling as with the vulgar crowd. And if it be true that they want and understand only simple words and plain speaking, I repeat once more that to rival nature in art implies a very high

stage of perfection; and that to avoid artificiality, cant, mannerism, extravagance, tediousness, is given, not to the ignorant amateur, but to the best and most thorough artist.

THE END.

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